

news

Major in secret link to Sinn Fein

David McKittrick
Ireland Correspondent

A secret channel of communication has been established between the British Government and the republican movement involving the SDLP leader John Hume.

The revelation, in the Dublin *Sunday Tribune*, was followed by statements from the Government and Sinn Fein which conspicuously refrained from denying that such a channel existed.

Later, two sources involved confirmed that a conduit existed between the republicans and London, even though no

IRA ceasefire has been in existence since February last. It appears to have survived even the double IRA car bomb attack on the army's Northern Ireland headquarters early last month.

Government involvement in such communication will come as little surprise to observers of the peace process which resulted in the August 1994 IRA ceasefire, since that saga featured a web of inter-eclectic contacts.

One problem now for the Government takes the form of an immediate political constraint on its freedom of manoeuvre. It is anxious to keep alive the continuing political talks at Stormont, yet it is clear

that Sinn Fein's entry into the talks, in the event of an IRA ceasefire, could well trigger a walkout by the mainstream Unionist parties.

The present channel appears to be on a similar model as the initial peace process, with Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams and Mr Hume attempting to devise a British Government form of words which would lead towards an IRA ceasefire. The Irish government and the Clinton administration are understood to be aware of this process.

The Government is said to want an IRA assurance that any new cessation would be permanent; if not, there would be

a three-month waiting period before Sinn Fein would be allowed into the Stormont talks. London also wants an end to IRA "punishment beatings".

The republican priority is to secure immediate entry to the Stormont talks, together with a request that a timeframe should be set for the duration of the negotiations. Republicans are adamant that "no new preconditions" should be set for their entry into talks.

Reconciling the concerns of the two sides is clearly a daunting task. Some of those involved complained yesterday that the public disclosure of the contacts and the glare of publicity would further limit every-

one's room for manoeuvre.

Some of these points were touched on in a Government statement yesterday which said: "If a new IRA ceasefire were declared we have made clear that we would need to look very carefully at what was being said and what was happening on the ground."

"It would obviously take time to establish that any ceasefire was genuinely unequivocal. As we have said many times, after the murderous attacks we have seen there could be no question of the IRA declaring a ceasefire one day and Sinn Fein joining the talks the next."

Both the Government and Sinn Fein yesterday specified that there had been no meetings between them. Sinn Fein said Gerry Adams and John Hume had since the beginning of the year been attempting to reconstruct the peace process and put a process of negotiation in place.

Mr Hume said yesterday: "I have been saying for some time that I have maintained contact with Gerry Adams with the objective of restoring the ceasefire. You can take it for granted that if I am trying to restore a ceasefire I am keeping both governments informed of what I am doing."

Tories face minority rule as MP dies

Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

John Major last night faced going into the general election with a minority government after the death of the Tory MP Barry Porter. If the Conservatives lose the by-election for his seat, they will be dependent on Ulster Unionist support.

Mr Porter's death reduced Mr Major's majority to one, and if Labour holds on to Barnsley East, where a by-election is pending, and takes Mr Porter's Wirral South seat, the Conservative Government will be in a minority of one for the first time since Lady Thatcher took office.

Mr Major would be able to struggle on to a general election next May but the symbolism of a minority government hanging on to power with the support of David Trimble's nine Ulster Unionist MPs could harm the Tories. They could spring a surprise and hold the by-election before Christmas but Labour leaders are planning for a campaign in February.

Wirral South, with a perilously thin Tory majority of 8,183, is regarded as winnable by Labour, which is expected to

throw everything into the fight for it. John Prescott, the deputy leader, who heads Labour's key-seats strategy, will be in charge of the campaign.

Mr Porter, an MP since 1979, had told friends last month that he had been given six weeks to live after being diagnosed with cancer. He bore his last days with fortitude and good humour, according to friends who visited him in a London hospital.

An outspoken right-winger, Mr Porter, 57, was a tough-talking, sometimes hard-drinking Merseysider, who was educated at Birkenhead. He was well-liked at Westminster, though he was the first backbencher to tell Baroness Thatcher it was about time she "hung up her boots", and he backed Michael Heseltine in the leadership race.

A committed Unionist, he was never afraid to criticise the Government and vigorously challenged the Prime Minister's judgement in accepting the ceasefire by the IRA in an attempt to get Sinn Fein into the peace talks.

His seat, neighbouring David Hunt's Wirral West, is in the comfortable suburbs of Merseyside, where the Tories need to do well to win the general election. Voting in the constituency's five Wirral borough wards in May's council elections put Labour ahead by a whisker. Labour polled 8,517 (37.5 per cent), the Tories 8,340 (36.7 per cent) and the Liberal Democrats 5,539 (24.4 per cent).

Mr Major said of Mr Porter, who was married with five children: "Barry's generous heart and good humour will be much missed at Westminster and in the Wirral. He served both his constituents and country well."

Obituary, page 16



Barry Porter: 'Generous and good humoured', said Major



Walk out: Ramblers are to protest today over the Church Estates Commissioners' ending of public access to Hag's Wood, near York, which the Forestry Commission plans to sell. The Church owns the shooting rights. Photograph: John Angerson

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Thousands overtaxed by computer fault

Barrie Clement
Labour Editor

Because of a computer software glitch, thousands and possibly millions of people leaving the dole for work have been paying too much tax, with the full knowledge of the Government.

The Employment Service acknowledges the mistake, which also affects graduates taking up their first job, but says it has been too busy establishing the tough new Jobseekers' Allowance to correct it.

Labour wants to know how many people and how much overpayment is involved and how much has been refunded. Ian McCartney, the chief employment spokesman, believes anything up to 3 million taxpayers could be involved.

The problem arises because people securing a job are automatically given an emergency tax code unless they can provide their own rating. For the low-

est-paid the overpayment can be considerable. For some people securing a job on £8,400 the excess tax could be £343, said Mr McCartney. The programming error was identified in February 1995 but corrective action scheduled for that October could not be taken because staff had to be diverted to the introduction of the Jobseekers' Act. Mike Fogden, chief executive of the Employment Service, said overpayment could continue until the defective NUBS2 software system is closed down in August next year.

Official figures show that between February 1995 and June 1996, 2,95m people moved from unemployment into work. Mr Ian McCartney said: "It's an absolute disgrace... Moving from benefit into work is often a particularly difficult time financially and it is astonishing that the Government has been piling on the misery by allow-

ing excess tax to be taken from people's pay packets." Mr McCartney contrasted the Government's keenness to introduce the Jobseekers' Allowance (JSA), which he believes will deprive many unemployed of benefits, with its inertia in dealing with overpayment of tax for those finding work.

In a letter to the Labour Party, Mr Fogden said that "substantial numbers" of civil servants had been diverted to the JSA. He said the overpayment of tax would occur "to a diminishing extent" after summer this year. Although the programme could not be altered because of pressure of work, "clerical procedures" were in place to deal with the problem until a new system was in place.

A spokeswoman for the Employment Service said refunds would be paid to those who legitimately claimed they had been overtaxed.

Girl, 10, finds 'lost' fungus

A 10-year-old girl has become the toast of the mushroom world after unearthing a specimen thought to have vanished from Britain 70 years ago.

Katie Whipp found the puff-ball fungus, known as Berkeley's Earth Star, close to her home at Cradley, near Malvern, Hereford and Worcester. The last known sighting of the mushroom - named after the founding father of mycology, the Rev Miles Joseph Berkeley - was in Norfolk in 1925. Dr David Felger, head of mycology at Kew, described the find as the "best and most exciting find this year".

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Crime Bill 'will bring huge costs'

Patricia Wynn Davies
Legal Affairs Editor

Michael Howard's Bill to toughen prison terms for serious and persistent offenders will clear its first parliamentary hurdle tonight, amid warnings that the measure will have "shambolic" effects that could cost hundreds of millions of pounds.

The Home Secretary's Crime (Sentences) Bill is on course to receive its Commons Second Reading with an overwhelming majority following Labour's de-

cision to instruct its MPs to abstain, in contrast to the Liberal Democrats, who have tabled a "reasoned" amendment on why the measure should not be given a Second Reading.

The Labour no-show will exasperate penal reformers, who believe the Bill is misconceived and will prove a failure in practice, while provoking derision from the Government benches.

But Jack Straw, the shadow Home Secretary, said: "We shall ensure the Bill receives a Second Reading. There are a

number of key points... which we positively support and others where the issue is not the aim of the Bill but the method."

Labour supports the imposition of automatic life sentences for second-time rapists and of community service orders or curfews as an alternative to jail for fine defaulters. However, Labour remains opposed to proposals to introduce fixed minimum sentences.

An emerging battleground is the Bill's blueprint for so-called "honesty in sentencing", which

judges should effectively have current sentence lengths. But Mr Fletcher said: "Judges would still be able to impose sentences of up to 14 years for burglary and up to two years for under-21-year-olds. This must have resource implications probably running into hundreds of millions in terms of prison costs." Time spent by prisoners on parole would be reduced by two-thirds in virtually every case, putting the public at more risk. "It's a potential shambles," he said.

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significant shorts

Legal aid reforms under fire

Consumer rights campaigners today urge the Government to reconsider its plans to reform the £1.4bn a year legal-aid scheme.

The reforms, detailed in a White Paper in July, include a tougher means test for legal-aid applicants, contributions towards costs from all applicants, and cash limiting in an effort to keep the legal-aid budget under control.

The NCC questions whether the changes would really save money. It says the bulk of legally aided cases involve custody, access to children and divorce disputes, home repossessions and personal injury claims, and it argues that if people are deterred from seeking aid to resolve such disputes, there may be significant knock-on costs in other areas.

NCC chairman David Hatch said: "The proposals seem to be based on myths and guesswork. In place of solid facts, we are told the rationale for change is widespread public concern - concern which, if it exists at all, relates mainly to the use of legal aid by the rich, not the poor, in a number of highly publicised cases."

TV tribute to Eric and Ernie

Morecambe and Wise were voted Britain's best television comedy act yesterday at a special awards ceremony to mark 60 years of BBC television.

More than half a million viewers cast votes for "Auntie's All-time Greats", with the comedy pair earning two trophies for best light entertainment show and favourite performers.

Des Lynam was voted best television presenter and Ronnie Barker, star of *Hullabaloo* and *Open All Hours*, got an award for outstanding achievement. Other winners were: David Jason (favourite sitcom performer); *Men Behaving Badly* (favourite sitcom); Victoria Wood (favourite comedy series - *As Seen on TV*); and favourite comedy performer; Colin Firth (favourite actor); Patricia Routledge (favourite actress); *Dr Who* (favourite popular drama); and *Pride and Prejudice* (favourite drama serial).

All lost in the supermarket

Shoppers are so stressed out by the sheer number of different brands, special offers and complicated instructions that they are missing out on the best deals, according to a new survey.

More than half the country's shoppers say they are angered or irritated when in the store and get into difficulties trying to compare value for money between different products. The switch to metric measurements has compounded the problem.

According to research conducted by Procter & Gamble, Britain has become a nation of "guessimators", with 67 per cent admitting to guessing when making measurements. Sue Keane, a psychologist and consumer behaviourist, said: "The problem is that the majority of us want to make quick decisions, rather than spend ages comparing products and studying information... which can lead to mistakes or even over-spending."

Clare Garner

Boy held over marina blaze

A 17-year-old boy was being questioned by police last night about a fire at a riverside marina in south-west London. More than 120 people were evacuated from Eel Pie Island, near Twickenham, after fire broke out at about 3am yesterday, threatening marina buildings and nearby houseboats. Police are treating the blaze as suspicious.

£20m lottery 'superdraw'

The National Lottery is to offer an estimated superdraw jackpot of £20m to celebrate its second anniversary on 16 November. Operators Camelot announced the prize in line with regulations which allow guaranteed jackpots.

Since the Lottery started in November 1994, there have been two superdraws, one of £10m and a second in March 1995 which "topped-up" the existing jackpot by £4m to more than £13m.

Jackpot winners in last Saturday's draw will collect less than £1m each. The £9.5m jackpot was shared between 11 punters, who each win £860,652. The winning numbers were 7, 23, 32, 35, 43 and 48, with bonus ball 25.

How to

Russians in Jesus.

How to turn a teacher into a real class dresser

Tory MPs want teachers to smarten up, but they don't have to be stuffed shirts

Jojo Moyes

The jeans, the ear-ring, the scruffy trainers; school standards are obviously slipping. And, according to Tory backbenchers, it's the teachers who have to smarten up their act.

Their plans were met with predictable outrage by teaching unions yesterday. But according to a leading image consultant, the sooner teachers stop trying to be "groovy" and get into their "pseudo-suits", the more respect would be afforded them by governors, parents and children themselves.

Dover MP David Shaw is to table an amendment to the current Education Bill which would lay down dress codes for "sloppily-dressed" teaching staff. "If teachers want to be treated like professionals - as they always say they do - then they should dress like professionals," Mr Shaw said.

Education Secretary Gillian Shephard yesterday indicated that the Government would not

something to look up to. This doesn't mean spending a lot of money, or fussing in front of a mirror," she said. "But children, far more so than previous generations, are bombarded by visual messages - the MTV three-second culture of imagery. If the visual presentation isn't interesting then they'll switch off."

Pupils, she said, were also more image conscious, and unlikely to "identify with" a teacher who tried to dress like them.

"When you're over 30 you just look like a professional reject. It's totally misguided to try to identify with kids. The last thing they want is for a thirty-something to think they're as groovy as they are. It's sad beyond belief. Pupils want the gap."

Likewise, however, teachers are unlikely to want to look like merchant bankers or shoulder the cost of Armani suits, a fact Ms Spillane accepts.

"The last thing you could hope to do is take 40-plus Corduroy Man and put him into designer trousers," she said. "But those nice cords shouldn't be 20 years old, should fit and should see a dry cleaners' occasionally."

She advocates the "pseudo-suit" - a nice jacket and smart pair of trousers. Female teachers, she added, should also appreciate that "looking mummy" may endear them to toddlers, but no one else. She suggests a nice trouser suit - "available at all price ranges."

Before Mr Shaw gets too smug however, it should be remembered that this time last year Ms Spillane, called in to advise Tory candidates, said Tory MPs resembled "a bunch of stuffed shirts" who "needed to look more like real people".

Yesterday Doug McAvoy, general secretary of the National Union of Teachers, warned of distracting from the real education debate into "trivial sidelines". "You shouldn't judge a book by its cover," he added.

"Those making this suggestion clearly have a folk memory of the mid-1980s when a minority of teachers leading protests at that time created a poor image for the profession," said John Sutton, general secretary of the Secondary Heads Association.

And clothes, after all, cannot make the teacher. The finest suit is not going to compensate for a teacher who is demotivated, overworked and, in some cases, under threat. For some schools, Ms Spillane has an alternative suggestion: "Armour plating."



Smart moves: Gillian Shephard said the Government would not support Mr Shaw's amendment to lay down dress codes for teachers. Mr Major faces more trouble on caning

Cane mutineers to give Major stick

Jojo Moyes

The Government faces the prospect of a rebellion by backbenchers determined to secure the return of corporal punishment in schools.

They were boosted at the weekend by four newspaper opinion polls showing support for caning running at two-to-one among the public.

They came after the Home Secretary, Michael Howard, became the latest minister to voice support for corporal punishment.

Senior Tories privately acknowledged there was "now strong backing right across the parliamentary party for its restoration."

Last Tuesday the Prime Minister ruled out a return to corporal punishment after the Secretary of State for Education, Gillian Shephard, said she viewed it as a "useful deterrent".

On Friday Robin Squire, a junior education minister, told the Commons he also favoured the cane "as a last resort".

Then Mr Howard became the most senior minister to enter the controversy when he told BBC Radio 4 he believed there was a place for corporal punishment "in extreme cases".

James Pawsley, the chairman of the key backbench education committee and a leader of the revolt, said the momentum of their campaign could force Mr Major to think again.

"The Prime Minister is an eminently reasonable man. The Prime Minister weighs matters up carefully and I believe that if the Prime Minister were to see there was a substantial or overwhelming case in favour then he might reconsider," he told BBC Radio 4's *World This Weekend*.

Mr Pawsley is planning to table an amendment to the

Education Bill which would enable schools to write caning into home-school contracts signed by parents.

But the Secretary of State for Wales, William Hague, insisted that the Government would not be swayed by the apparent swing of public opinion.

"We don't have government by instant opinion poll," he told BBC1's *On the Record*. "It is a side-issue. It is not going to come back in the current parliament. The Government's policy is not going to change."

The latest controversy comes at a time when school discipline is high on the political agenda following the troubles at the Ridings School, in Yorkshire, and at Manton School, in Nottinghamshire.

A teachers' leader yesterday called on the Government to intervene as a compromise aimed at reopening Manton school appeared in danger of collapse.

Nigel de Gruchy urged Mrs Shephard to step in to settle the long-running dispute over the school, which was closed by a

teachers' strike over the behaviour of a 10-year-old boy. Ofsted inspectors are due tomorrow to report to governors at the Ridings, also closed by disruptive pupils.

NASUWT members have backed strike action, claiming that 60 pupils are unteachable. Last week Calderdale Council closed the school in the interests of safety after further assaults by pupils on teachers.

But Labour's shadow education secretary, David Blunkett, yesterday warned against

a rush to legislate on caning on the back of the highly publicised troubles. "This is a bygone issue," he told BBC1's *Frontline* programme. "It is ruled out. It was ruled out 10 years ago."

He added: "This argument has been started by Gillian Shephard and Michael Howard more in an attempt to set the climate for the post-election battle as to who is going to lead the Tory party than it is about the actual issue itself."

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Russians pull the strings in Jesus, the puppet show

David Lister Arts News Editor

A dark, semitic-looking Christ is the star of a new £5m film of the life of Jesus, with Russian puppet versions of the Messiah and his disciples.

It is being produced by Channel 4 Wales and BBC Wales in association with a Russian co-producer, Christmas Films of Moscow, and will be shown in cinemas in 1998.

The surprise about the film, currently being worked on in Moscow and Cardiff, is that with British model animation leading the world in the wake of Oscar-winning Wallace and Gromit, Channel 4 and the BBC wanted the Russian co-producers to do the model animation scenes for *The Jesus Story*.

It has an all-star cast of voices, with Ralph Fiennes of *Schindler's List* fame playing Jesus. And although they are only voices and are not seen, there were moments of method acting. The executive producer, Chris Grace, recalled yesterday that for the crucifixion scene Fiennes took off his sandals in the voice studio, stood on tiptoe and stretched his arms wide.

Mr Grace, who is director of animation at SAC (Channel 4 Wales) said yesterday: "There has been great success in Britain with Wallace and Gromit et al but the Russians give their model animation a different language. It's more representational and more realistic. More stylistic. With the Animated Shakespeare, which we did with the Russians as co-producers, we found they made the animation models real people, and 10-year-olds were completely absorbed."

The production team spent



Role model: Christ entering Pontius Pilate's palace in a scene from *The Jesus Story*

time in Jerusalem taking advice from archaeologists and other biblical experts. Speaking of the physical portrayal of Jesus, Mr Grace said: "He looks Jewish, right? He is slightly dark, Middle Eastern-looking. We deliberately wanted to get away from the traditional white with blond hair and blue eyes figure."

The language in *The Jesus Story*, whose target audience is aged 9-14, is contemporary and laced with biblical allusions. Some of the story is told in flashbacks to Jesus's youth, of which there is little mention in the Bible. One scene has him as a carpenter working on a building site for a new synagogue.

Also in the cast of voices are

Miranda Richardson as Mary Magdalene, Ian Holm as Pontius Pilate, David Thewlis as Judas and Richard E Grant as John the Baptist. The National Theatre actor Michael Bryant is the voice of God, and the voices of Julie Christie, Antony Sher and William Hurt are also in the cast.

Only yesterday it was revealed that BBC Radio 4 had dropped an irreverent comedy series *Eamon, Older Brother of Jesus*, written by and starring Irish comedian Michael Redmond. It joked about Mary's virginity and called the Good Samaritan "an insufferable prat". The decision to cancel it was taken by Radio 4's new con-

troller, James Boyle, who is a Roman Catholic. The producers of the new feature film about Jesus were determined to avoid controversy and showed their script to an inter-denominational panel which included Lord Habgood, the former Archbishop of York.

Voicing his approval, Lord Habgood said: "It is a moving and imaginative treatment of the story, basically faithful to the text, and set in dramatic form."

Dr Margaret Bevan of the Institute of Jewish Affairs said the script was "extraordinarily moving - the compassion, the pared language, the emotional intensity; the effect is at times startling".

re costs

news

She thought it was just a holiday. Instead this 15-year-old was being dragged away to marry

New guidelines will help girls escape arranged marriages abroad.
Report by Ian Burrell

The Foreign Office is to issue young Muslim and Hindu women of dual nationality with an escape package to help them avoid being forced into arranged marriages.

The decision follows a succession of cases in which young British-born women have been coerced into marriage, having been told by their families that they were going on holiday.

Dr Liam Fox, Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, said: "We do not accept that culture and tradition can be used as an excuse for what we consider to be abuses on moral and human rights grounds."

"Not all countries see this issue in the same way as us, so you cannot always depend upon the co-operation or support of other governments."

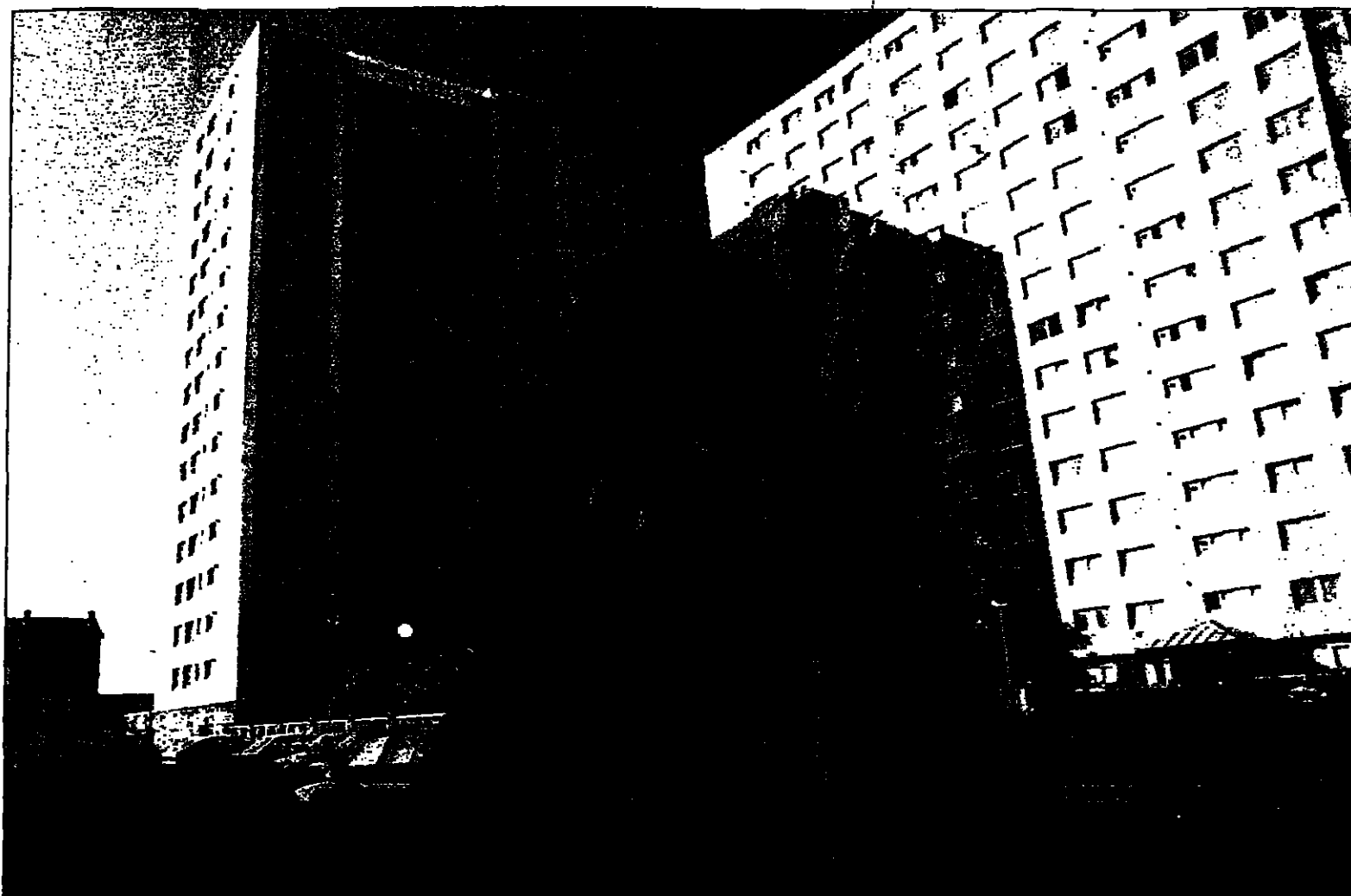
"It is therefore important to concentrate on alerting young people to the measures they can take to protect themselves: prevention is the key."

The women are advised always to travel on their British passports and to keep a list of emergency telephone numbers to call for help. They are also advised to tell a close friend of their expected return date so that the friend can alert the Foreign Office if necessary.

Ishya Mohammed, 15, a Cardiff schoolgirl, was taken on what was ostensibly a holiday in Yemen. The girl's mother, Marie Davies, alerted the Foreign Office in May after hearing nothing for three months.

Ishya's brother, Razzaq, 19, then arrived at the British embassy in Aden, claiming that family members were trying to force him and his sister into arranged marriages.

At first the Foreign Office warned: "By virtue of her dual nationality she is now deemed to be a Yemeni national in Yemeni eyes and Britain has no direct responsibility or locus as far as they are concerned." Nevertheless after negotiations between British and Yemeni au-



Great escape: 15-year-old Ishya Mohammed, back in Cardiff after Foreign Office intervention to prevent a forced marriage in Yemen Photograph: Huw Evans

thorities both teenagers were returned to Wales.

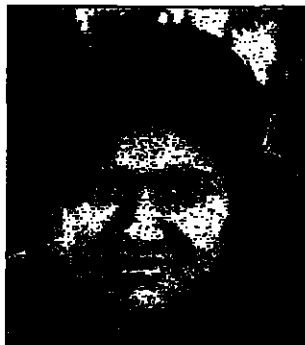
Two Glasgow sisters, Nazia and Rifat Haq, were forced into arranged marriages after travelling to Pakistan on a family holiday last year. When they arrived they were surrounded by a group of men and forced into three cars. After a fortnight in captivity, Rifat, then 20, was made to marry a 27-year-old cousin and Nazia, then 13, was made to marry a man of 40.

The girls' brother Nadeem, 17, raised the alarm that they had been abducted, and a campaign was started in Glasgow to bring them home. Their nine-month ordeal ended in March when the British High Commission intervened and issued the girls new passports which they used to return to Britain.



Rifat (left) and Nazia Haq: Forced into marriage after being told they were going to Pakistan for a family holiday

The Foreign Office is now advising women who may be at risk to make a note of their passport number and its place of issue and keep it safe in case their passport is confiscated; they



are also advised to visit their local library before departure to get the address of the British diplomatic mission nearest to where they will be staying. As a last resort, they are told to in-

form on their "arranged husbands" if the couple return to live in Britain. "If you have been forced into a marriage you should let the entry clearance officer know the true position as soon as possible."

The forced marriage advice warns: "Some young British nationals have travelled abroad for a specific family reason only to find themselves in completely different, unexpected and unacceptable circumstances, including being forced into marriage under duress."

The guidelines, in a document called *Your Rights Abroad*, will be made available at airports, citizens' advice bureaux, and libraries. They will be issued this month as part of the Foreign Office's campaign to inform people of what consuls can

and cannot do for Britons abroad.

The countries where most forced marriage cases occur are Pakistan, India, Yemen, Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco. Britain is anxious to resolve such disputes without confrontation with the host country.

Selma Rahman, project coordinator of the Meridian women's centre in Glasgow, said a clear distinction should be drawn between arranged marriages and forced marriages.

She said: "Neither Islam nor the Hindu religion condones or expects women to be married against their will. Both religions expect women to be consulted, participating and agreeing to the marriage. Women have the right to say no."

Labour threatens dishonest tour firms

Simon Calder
Travel Editor

Britain's travel industry was told yesterday to clean up its act or face legislation from a future Labour government.

The party's consumer affairs spokesman, Nigel Griffiths, said on Radio Five Live that present compensation rights over changes in charter flight times were inadequate.

He said Britain's tour operators were taking advantage of lax regulations to change flight times by 11 hours without compensation.

"I have heard reports that some tour operators are deliberately advertising attractive departure times without having available airport slots, then switching them to more anti-social but cheaper timings and pocketing the £5 or £10 savings."

He said that unless the industry reached a voluntary agreement before the election, an incoming Labour government would add breach of small print to the Unfair Contract Terms Act.

The call has met with a mixed response from Britain's biggest tour operators. Martin Brackebury, a director of the Thomson Travel Group, Britain's largest, said: "There has to be an acceptance that there will be changes because the summer brochure launch pre-dates the scheduling meeting each November when precise flight timings are decided."

But Steve Endacott, sales director for Airtrons - Thomson's nearest rival - said such a move would benefit "vertically integrated" companies such as his. "We have our own aircraft and rights to popular slots, so vertically integrated tour operators are well placed to meet tighter restrictions."

The ABTA convention was also told that British tourists

were 30 per cent more likely to be dissatisfied with their package holidays than they were two years ago. In a poll commissioned by ABTA, 1 in 11 tourists was unhappy with his or her holiday. When travellers were asked who they would trust to give impartial advice about a destination, half said travel agents, one in five believed tour operators and brochures but none at all said they would trust an MP.

The major High Street travel agencies were accused of offering biased advice and "bogus discounts". Allowing big holiday companies to have their own individual travel agencies was "at best unethical and at worst illegal", said David Speakman, head of computer-based travel agency Travel Counsellors. "How dare these big companies pretend to be unbiased. They have done tremendous damage to the independent travel agents."

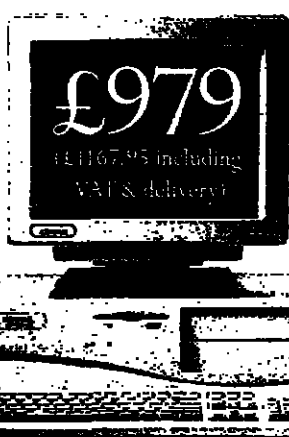
Mr Speakman's appeal on behalf of the independent operators was echoed by Graham Simpson, chief of the Simply Travel company. He told delegates that the major tour operators dealt with "price and gimmicks" while the big travel agents offered "lack of personal service, lack of flexibility and a lack of knowledge."

Tony Bennett, of Going Places, told the conference the UK's five largest tour operators had lost 1 in 12 customers to smaller holiday companies over the past year.

Going Places is the travel agency chain of Airtrons, and Mr Bennett was making the case that such vertically-integrated travel firms were not dominating the market and reducing consumer choice.

The Office of Fair Trading has been investigating the travel industry for more than a year, but has yet to publish its findings.

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	£15,000	154.01	169.74	205.95	325.54
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news

Veteran of the struggle sees Collins come alive at last

Louise Jury

Neil Jordan's film about the Irish republican leader Michael Collins, released at the end of this week, has been dogged by controversy. It is not the first.

Nearly a quarter of a century ago, the actor-director Kenneth Griffith made a television documentary on Collins which stirred equal passions. It was banned for 21 years.

Griffith saw one Prime Minister - Harold Wilson - and three Northern Ireland ministers as the Establishment tried to fathom why a Welsh-born Protestant cared so passionately about the mastermind whose guerrilla tactics brought the British government to the negotiating table and who signed the treaty in December

1921 which split the Irish nation. Ireland is Griffith's passion. He has a plastic bullet and a rubber bullet in his living room, pictures of himself and republican friends in Londonderry and a picture of Michael Collins jostles for place alongside posters proclaiming the Irish Republic. He even named his home Michael Collins House as a defiant gesture after his film was banned.

Kenneth Griffith, now 75, did not want to see Neil Jordan's film. Although he can remember discussing Collins with the then unknown Jordan some 30 years ago, Griffith feared the movie would succumb to Hollywoodisation and exaggerate the love interest (Kitty Kiernan played by Julia Roberts in Liam Neeson's Collins). "If the film



Liam Neeson as the film's eponymous hero, and Kenneth Griffith. Photograph: Adrian Dennis

isn't suppressed for 21 years, there's something wrong with it," he said. He was also slightly irked that the now-famous director had not consulted him. "There's no one who knows all this like I do," he said.

But as the criticism mount-

ed that Jordan was providing succour to the IRA and encouraging support for Sinn Féin, Griffith persuaded him to change his mind and watch the film at a screening in Soho, London.

He said he cared nothing for

the creative merit of Jordan's work. "The only thing that matters is the final emancipation of Ireland," he said. "I'm not concerned whether this is a good film or a bad film but whether it helps Ireland."

He emerged from the screen-

ing shaking - but satisfied that the film could not harm his beloved adopted homeland because it explains a part of Irish history he believes few British people understand.

"It was the most agonising morning of my life. I found it unbearable," he said. On screen were characters he knows like old friends such as Tom Barry, who was one of Collins' hit squad, and Dave Neligan, who was a friend of Brody's, the detective played by Stephen Rea.

Griffith's worries were dispelled. He had feared that the historical inaccuracies - born of dramatisation into a two-hour film - would allow the critics to pour scorn. "But they are short-cuts to the truth," he said.

"I thought the truth would be compromised, by his [Jordan's]

employers, by the money people, by America. But he took no liberties. I'm very glad it's going to give the Establishment, particularly the Tories, a bad time. If there's one thing the English cannot stand, it's the truth."

To Griffith, Collins was a hero who tried to free the Irish people through revolution because he could see no other way. Griffith sees nothing wrong with this. But neither does he regard such a position as anti-British. He regards himself as a patriot, "the last true patriot" because he believes the British are a decent people who ought to acknowledge their "filthy behaviour in Ireland".

Griffith's perspective differs somewhat from the majority British view, of course. He is a supporter of Sinn Féin and its

military wing. "I am no pacifist," he declares, a stance which has prompted death threats.

But all underdogs and revolutionaries win his attention. Though perhaps best known as the librarian in the Peter Sellers film *Only Two Can Play* and in a string of British movies including *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, he is also an accomplished documentary maker. He recently finished a programme about the intouchables of India.

When Gary Adams looked likely to be refused a visa to travel to the United States, he asked Griffith whether he would consider going in his place. "It would be the culmination of my career," he replied, and was disappointed not to have got the opportunity.

Police plan nationwide children's drug survey

Jason Bennetto
Crime Correspondent

A national drugs audit of Britain's youth is being prepared by police as part of a strategy to combat abuse among teenagers. In what will be the largest drug survey yet of young people, 100,000 children aged 11-17 are to be questioned throughout the country next year.

The results will be used in anti-drug programmes tailored to each region's problems. Police and regional health authorities will jointly run the schemes. For some years senior officers have been pressing for more preventive measures rather than simply stiffer penalties.

The Association of Chief Police Officers (Acpo) drugs committee is drawing up details of the survey and is discussing finance with a private sponsor.

Confidential questionnaires will be sent to secondary-school pupils asking about drug habits, what substances they take, where they get them and what influences their choice. The police believe too little is understood about drug habits of the young and fear society is failing to curb the popularity of illegal substances.

Ray White, Chief Constable of Dyfed Powys and the new president of the Acpo, said tackling the problem was going

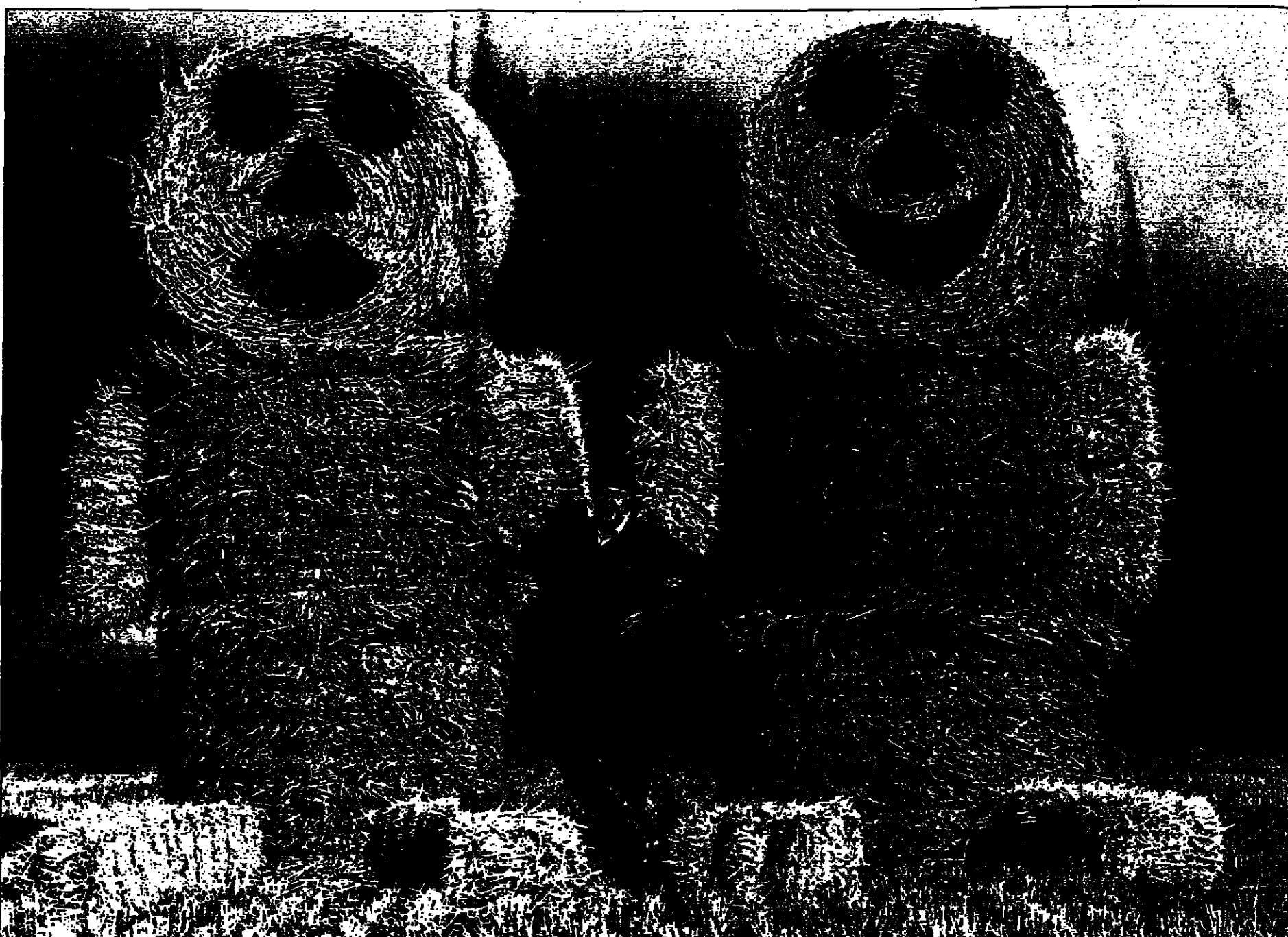
to be a key aim in the coming year. "We do not have a clear national picture of drug use among the young... We believe a large national survey to establish the scale of the drug problem is a vital first step. Drugs dominate the whole question of crime. The two are totally inter-related. Serious drug abuse is probably the greatest worry parents have about their children. Our means of measuring progress in this field at the moment is very crude. The number of arrests and seizures are not reliable enough indicators - they can be affected by the level of resources."

The survey will give details of the drug trends in different parts of the country. For example, Glasgow has a problem with heroin and Temazepam, while parts of south London have more trouble with crack cocaine and amphetamines.

Mr White said it was intended to do the survey by the end of next year and have a follow-up study five years later, to see if the strategies worked.

Jack Straw, the shadow Home Secretary, said he would support the survey. "We don't know enough about youngsters' drug habits. I hope a survey will help pin down why drug habits vary so much between different areas. If you can identify the variations, this will help you deal with the problems."

It may be corny, but it's all my own work



Dolly partners: Farmer Ron Walker is dwarfed by 13ft 'corn dollies' which are causing a stir on the road from Nottingham to Merton Mowbray. They were built 'as a bit of fun' by his son Roger, 31, and wife Davina to brighten up the fields at Hickling Pastures. At least they make a change from corn circles, Mr Walker says. Photograph: Taras Kovaliv

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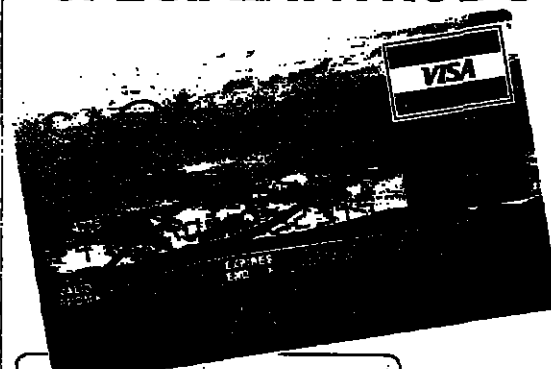
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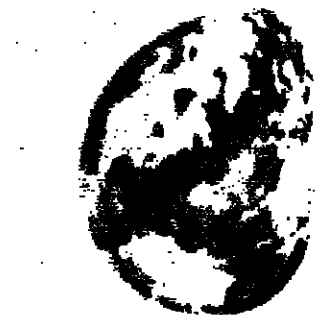
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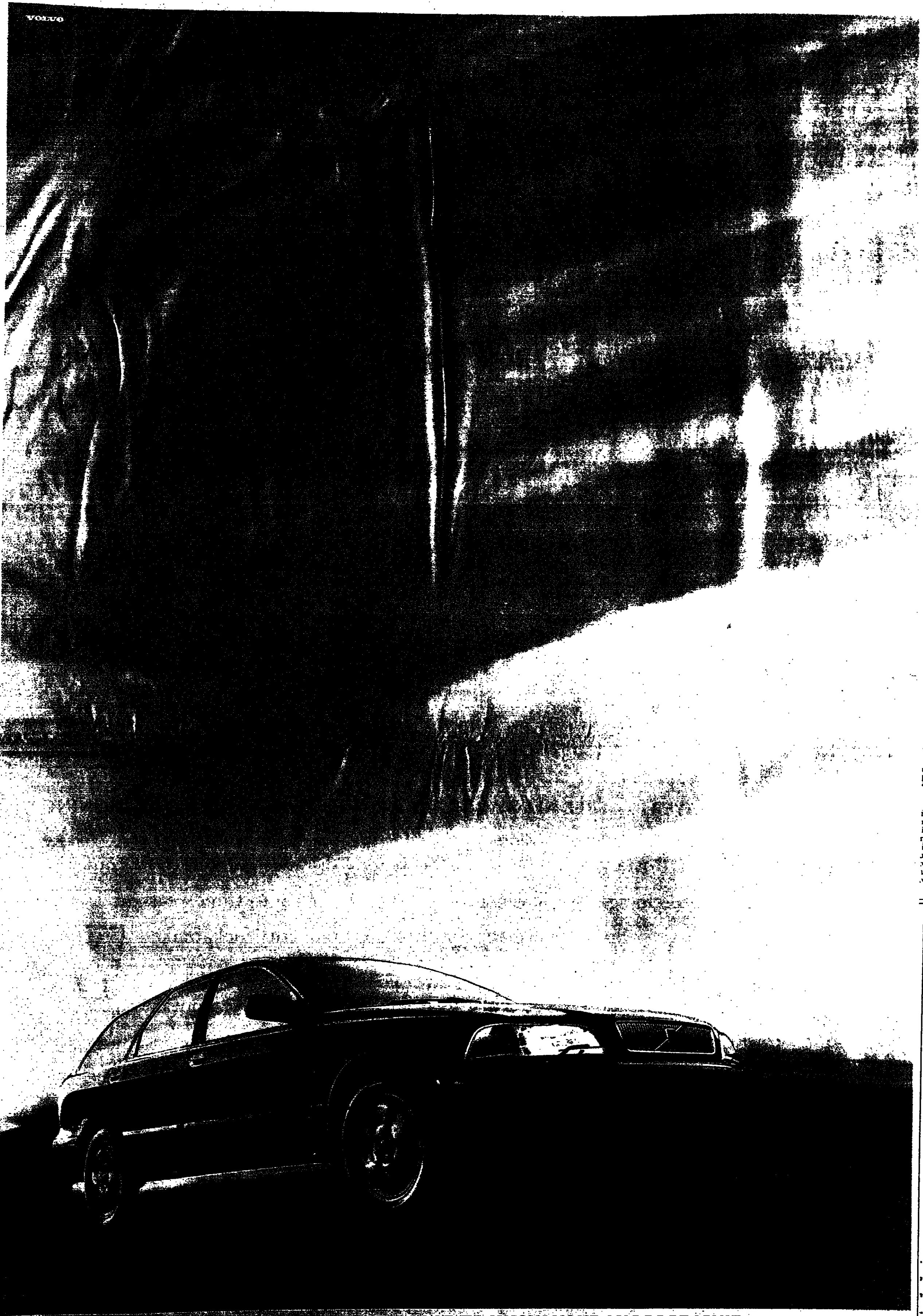
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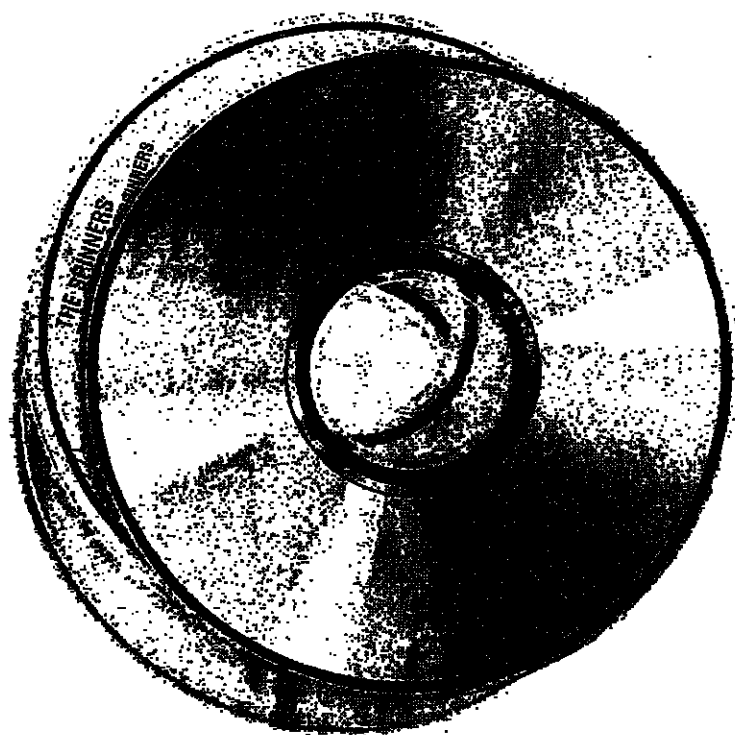
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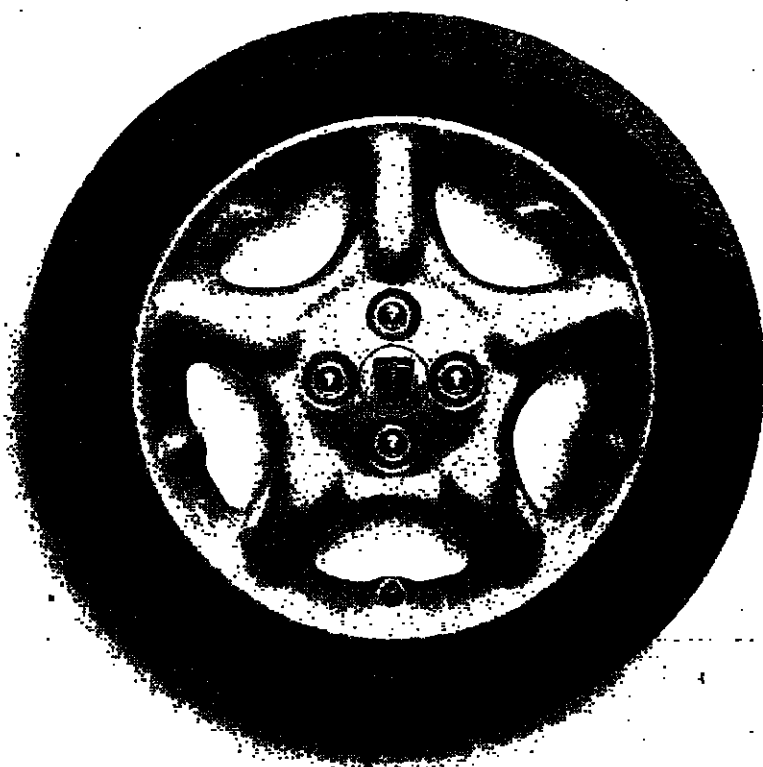
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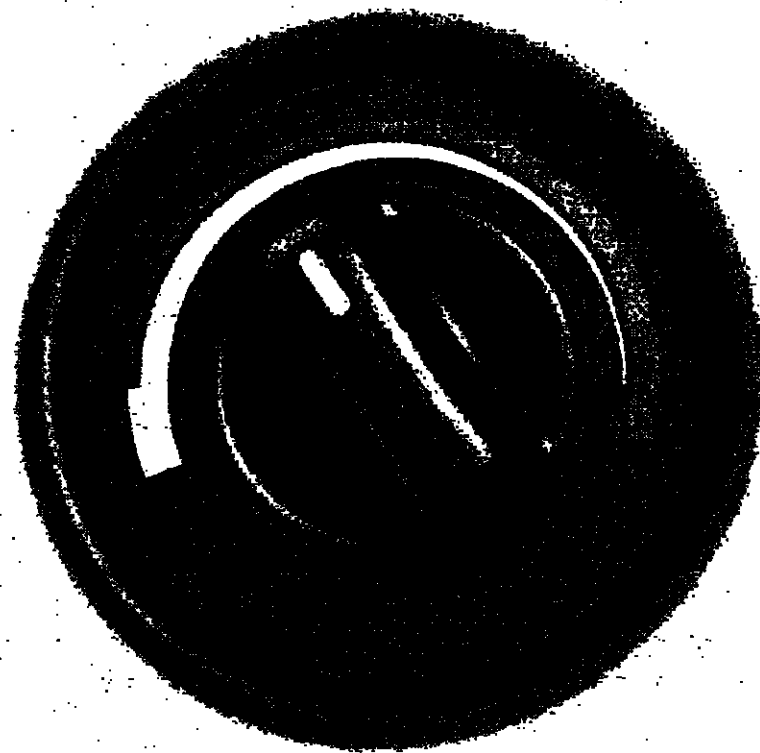
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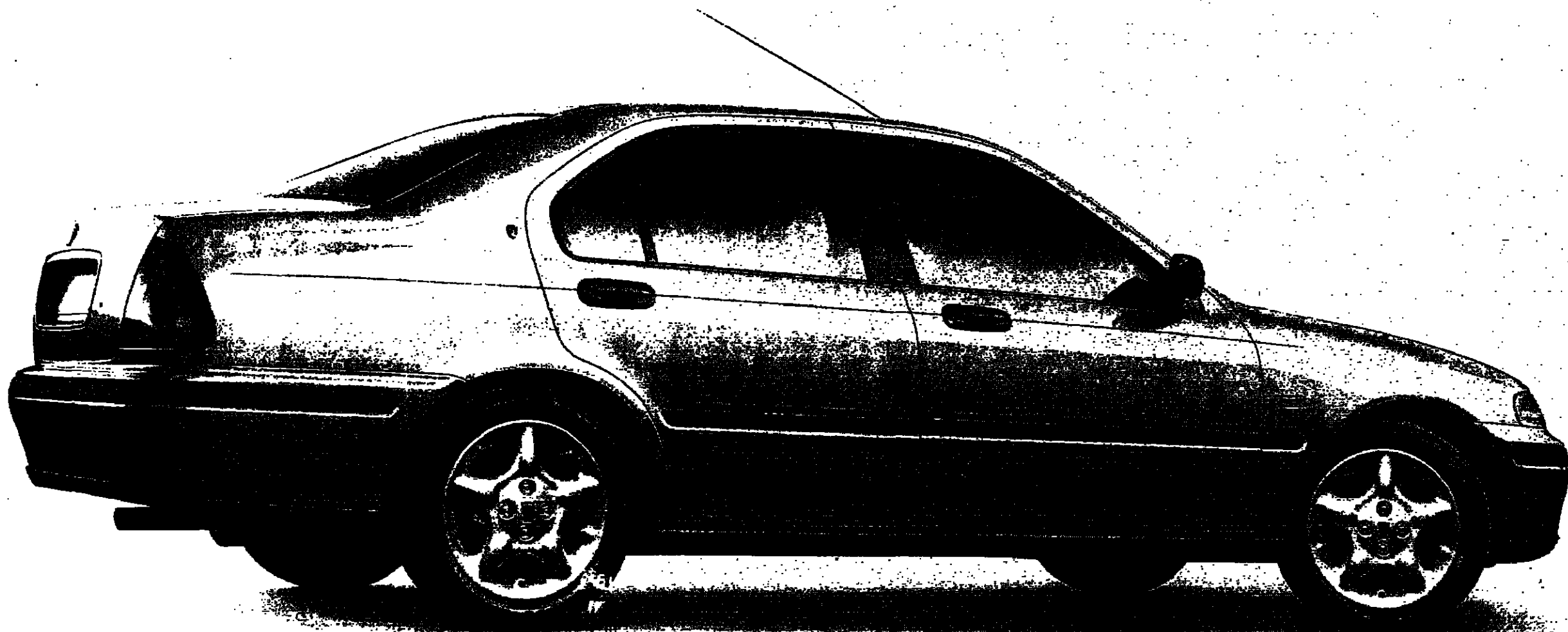
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مركزنا من الامم



Fallen greatness: Newhailes House, near Edinburgh, is a link to Scotland's golden age of artistic and intellectual development. Now it is beset by decay, with shelves of its once-celebrated library empty

Photograph: Colin MacPherson

Dr Johnson's gem in peril

Stephen Goodwin
Heritage Correspondent

It is a house virtually unchanged since the 18th century, a golden age of artistic and intellectual development in Scotland.

Lady Antonia Dalrymple says she will miss the view north over the Firth of Forth to the hills of Fife when she moves from her mouldering mansion to a cottage in the estate grounds.

Though frail and grey, her smile and delicate features are unmistakably those of the young woman in the portrait hanging in the chaotic upstairs sitting room. It was painted from a photograph taken 50 years ago, soon after she came to Newhailes House as the bride of Sir Mark Dalrymple. Her favourite view is over one shoulder.

But 71-year-old Lady Antonia speaks of the future with a certainty not obvious in her advisers. Just one month remains

for the National Trust for Scotland to raise the £2.7m it needs to take on Newhailes and start restoration work which could eventually see books returned to a library Dr Johnson called "the most learned drawing-room in Europe".

Though only five miles from Edinburgh, the house is not easy to find. The entrance is off a new roundabout, by an industrial estate. Local people know it as the way to a plant nursery. But a fork beyond the stone gate piers leads past a "private" sign and under trees, to reveal the neo-classical villa across a damp lawn amid a carriage turning circle.

The centre block of Newhailes was built in 1686 by the architect James Smith, and extended following its purchase by the Dalrymples, an Edinburgh legal dynasty, in 1707. Decay is written across the exterior, from the stone to the corroded ironwork and rotted balustrade of the stairway.

Inside, the state rooms are sumptuous but marred by damp stains, cracks, woodworm holes and peeling decoration. Baroque plasterwork and woodcarving extend throughout. And in each room there are family portraits set in the panelling, including several by Allan Ramsay, the pre-eminent Scottish painter of the era.

But the most important room at Newhailes is the library. From the 1750s the head of the family was Sir David Dalrymple, the law lord Lord Hailes and a key figure in the Scottish Enlightenment. At the mahogany desk which stands in the shuttered gloom of the two-storey library he wrote the *Annals of Scottish History*, known as the first "modern" history of Scotland.

Now bird droppings litter the grate beneath the ornate marble chimney-piece and, most chilling of all, the book cases which line three vast walls are empty. (A dusty polar bear



Lady Antonia Dalrymple: Threat of 'dreadful' auction

Photograph: Colin MacPherson

skin is stretched out in front of the cold hearth - a wedding present from a big game-hunting cousin of Lady Antonia's.)

The books and Lord Hailes's papers were removed to the National Library of Scotland in 1976 in lieu of death duties following the death of Sir Mark Dalrymple at the age of 56.

But the money that the National Trust for Scotland needs to purchase the contents and fund the restoration and endowment totals £12.7m.

About £8m is expected to come from the Heritage Lottery Fund, and support has been offered by the National Art Collections Fund for purchase of the pictures.

That leaves a shortfall of £2.7m to be made up by Trust members. So far £500,000 has been secured. But only a month of the appeal remains before the Trust has to decide whether to go ahead.

If by the end of this month it is not satisfied that sufficient

funds are promised then the deal will be off. The Newhailes collection would be sold privately.

"It would mean having Christie's down to auction it all on the lawn," said Lady Antonia. "I think it would be quite dreadful, don't you?"

Many of the treasures would probably leave Scotland, and a matchless archive of the Enlightenment would never return to the shelves of the sepulchral library.

National Trust: We're no clique

Leaders of the National Trust called for less confrontation and better communication as members urged greater openness in the running of Britain's largest charity, writes Stephen Goodwin.

Charles Nunneley, addressing 1,000 members at the Trust's AGM in London, rejected accusations in a series of letters to *The Independent* recently that the Trust leadership was "arrogant, elitist and dominated by an aristocratic landowning clique". Mr Nunneley said: "I take criticisms like that very seriously, because they show that we have failed in our duty of communicating the true state of affairs to our members and the world at large."

A resolution to require disclosure of how the chairman casts the thousands of unmandated votes at his disposal each AGM was rejected by 42,284 votes to 20,577. With Mr Nunneley and the council against what they regarded as a "meddlesome" motion, the result was never in doubt.

Supporters of the change argued that greater transparency

would have enabled members who voted in past years against hunting on Trust land to know whether many grassroots members opposed them or just the council. But Mr Nunneley pointed out that members who gave the chairman unmandated proxies did so knowing the council's position.

The "block vote" also ensured the reelection of nine sitting members of the policy-making council for another three-year term - filling the only vacancies. Eight would-be newcomers failed to get elected.

Mr Nunneley said there had certainly been occasions when the atmosphere had been "more of confrontation than of communication". As to elitism, he said that of the 52 council members, eight had titles (just one lord) but that did not seem to him "to matter ainker's cuss one way or the other". There were 36 men and 26 women; 14 members were linked with academia, eight had top level experience in business and management and six were large-scale farmers and landowners.

DAILY POEM

Mrs Mop

By Glyn Wright

When I asked my man should I marry a soldier
she said if I loved him then I must.
We shared the richest cake my lips have touched
then he put on beret, black polished boots
and marched off into a November fog,
came back next spring, spoke of some damned
infernal place, the nearest to earthly hell.

When I heard of his posting I ran to the dock,
stood with young wives on the ferry's top deck
waving to one man lost in two thousand.
Back and forth we chugged the river
all the fellows waving from the big ship
as we went on waving, always waving
into the long bitter winter night.

Glyn Wright was yesterday awarded the 1996 Aldeburgh Poetry Festival Prize for Best First Collection for *Could Have Been Funny* (Spoke, £4.99). The Aldeburgh Poetry Festival began in 1989, running over the first weekend in November, and this year attracted record audiences. Information about the 1997 Festival may be obtained in the new year from the Poetry Festival Box Office, Aldeburgh Foundation, High Street, Aldeburgh, Suffolk IP15 5AX.

David Lister
Arts News Editor

The National Lottery's millions of pounds for good causes could turn from being one of the Government's great pre-election boasts to a massive pre-election embarrassment.

The *Independent* has learned that numerous prestigious arts organisations may not now receive the money they have been promised.

It also emerges that the razzmatazz money give-away on prime time television every Saturday night is a gigantic fake. When a smiling Anthea Turner gave giant-sized cheques to ecstatic recipients, only Miss Turner's smile was genuine.

Voicing discontent about the procedure for the first time yesterday by a lottery money dis-

tributor, a spokeswoman for the Arts Council said: "We wish they would not hand over those cheques on television. It is utterly misleading. No money is actually changing hands."

Those cheques are void. None of the good causes receives their lottery millions in one tranche. Indeed, those that have won the money for rebuilding and redevelopment have to get the work done first then present invoices. Their business and artistic plans are continually monitored. If at any stage they fail to satisfy the Arts Council (the distributor for the arts) the promise to deliver the money will not be honoured.

For example, the Royal Opera House's award of £55m has not yet been paid to the ROH. Only £9m has been handed over. The rest will be given when the Roy-

al Opera House satisfies the Arts Council that it can raise matching funding from private sources and deliver on its long-term business and artistic plans.

In the case of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, realising the award looks likely. Other organisations may not be so lucky. It is not just the problem of raising matching funding from private sources. If Virginia Bottomley, Secretary of State for National Heritage, fails to negotiate at least a standstill grant from the Treasury for the arts later this month, some high-profile organisations will not be able to deliver on artistic and business plans they promised the Arts Council.

The Government's published projection is for a £3m cut for the arts. Mary Allen, the Arts Council secretary general, says

she has heard rumours of a cut as high as £10m. If this happens the lottery awards may not be paid because organisations will not be able to pay the staff to supervise redevelopment projects or mount the events in their new buildings.

An Arts Council spokeswoman said those who would be

in trouble with less than a standstill grant and whose awards "might have to be reassessed" include Sir Simon Rattle's City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Society, the Salisbury Playhouse, Bolton Octagon, Cambridge Arts Theatre, and Yorkshire Dance Centre.

A spokesman for Virginia Bottomley at the National Heritage Department said: "It is technically a fact that lottery awards might not be paid if certain criteria are not met. But this is the first we have heard of this as a problem and it seems at the moment a little hypothetical."

Sham behind lottery cheques for the arts

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news

France urges EU to intervene in Zaire

Mary Braid
Gisenyi, Rwanda

A day after the Zairean town of Goma apparently fell to Tutsi rebels, creating yet another wave of refugees in the crisis engulfing central Africa, sporadic gunfire could still be heard in Gisenyi, just over the Rwandan border.

As the thousands who fled Goma at the weekend spent their first day in refugee camps in Rwanda, it seems that, despite overwhelming Zairean troops, skirmishes between the rebels and opposing forces continue. Fifteen heavy explosions were also heard in Bukavu, south of Goma, which fell to the Zairean Banyamulenge Tutsis last week. Caught up in the fighting are more than 1 million Rwandan Hutu refugees who fled to Zaire two years ago after the Hutu genocide of 800,000 Tutsi citizens.

Yesterday France, criticised for its diplomatic stance on the 1994 genocide, called on the European Union to prepare to intervene to head off a disaster in the region.

Many aid workers and political analysts believe the only solution to the crisis is the return of the Hutu refugees to Rwanda but while Zaireans have poured over the border to escape the fighting, Hutus were still showing no signs of returning home. Their presence in eastern Zaire and the influence of the Hutu extremists who lead them has proved a destabilising force in the region.

More than 700,000 Hutu refugees are huddled together in camps around Goma. Fear and panic has created the largest refugee camp in the world at Muganga, where 400,000 are packed in.

"The camps are completely overcrowded," said one aid-

programme director yesterday. "Disease will soon set in. Forty thousand Hutu refugees died in 1994 when a cholera epidemic hit the camp."

The aid workers said it was cynical to say so, but the absence of television cameras in the cut-off camps might this time ensure that short-term decisions about the crisis were avoided and a more lasting solution found. "People will undoubtedly die," he said. "But perhaps this time we will get a proper solution. Hard decisions must be taken."

He admitted the camps, sustained by international donors at a cost of \$2.8m (£1.8m) a day, had become a base from which Hutu extremists could hit back across the border at the new Tutsi-led Rwandan government. He said many people criticised the aid workers for failing to rid the camps of the hardliners. "But it is not easy to remove

the leadership," he said. "And while it is easy to recognise what has gone wrong, it is far harder to put it right."

The eleventh-hour evacuation of more than 100 aid workers from Goma on Saturday has left the refugees to fend for themselves, with just two weeks supply of food left. Aid organisations say fear of returning home and intimidation has trapped them in the camps.

Yesterday Rwanda, which has everything to gain from the break-up of the camps, insisted again that it had no intention of launching military operations against Zaire. But witnesses report that Rwandan troops did indeed take part in Tutsi rebel action against Zairean forces at the weekend.

One refugee said yesterday that anti-Zairean fighters had carried large guns and were well-equipped when entered took Goma.



Home-ghost: Barah Dana hugs her elder brother Mohamed at their house near Hebron which the child's uncle, Shaker Dana, said was petrol-bombed by Jewish settlers. Five were injured in a fire caused by the incident. Photograph: Reuters

Rifkind's plea for Palestine

Patrick Cockburn
Hebron

Whoever hurled the large stone that smashed the front window of the press bus accompanying Malcolm Rifkind was probably unaware that the British Foreign Secretary was in Hebron. But he did succeed in underlining the restiveness of the 100,000 Palestinians in the city as they wait for the long-delayed agreement on Israeli redeployment.

Mr Rifkind, the most senior European politician to visit Hebron, told Mustafa Natshe, the mayor, that Britain was committed to "the self-determination of the Palestinian people" and that "all [Israeli] settlements are illegal". Israeli withdrawal was necessary for the peace process to retain credibility.

Mr Rifkind's visit is part of the increased diplomatic pressure on Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, since a day of fighting in September left 60 Palestinians and 15 Israelis dead. Mr Rifkind said Mr Netanyahu had assured him that Israel would implement other parts of the interim agreement with the Palestinians signed last year, in addition to that relating to Hebron.

Palestinians want to force Is-

rael to transfer three further instalments of territory as previously agreed. That would make it more difficult for Israel to isolate the small enclaves which the Palestinians already rule.

Mr Rifkind's visit, while less combative than that of Jacques Chirac, the French President, last month, emphasises Mr Netanyahu's diplomatic isolation. In Hebron he said that "the option of a Palestinian state must be available". He then left for Gaza where he was due to meet Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian leader.

In addition to Israel withdrawing from most of Hebron, Palestinians want agreements implemented to release prisoners and open a safe passage between the West Bank and Gaza. The deal on Hebron may be signed at the Middle East economic summit in Cairo on 12 November.

Meanwhile there are fears that Israeli settlers in Hebron will attack Palestinians to sabotage the agreement. Near Kiryat Arba, the Jewish settlement overlooking the city, settlers yesterday hurled petrol bombs at a Palestinian house, setting it ablaze and injuring five people, one critically, family members said.

Media mogul accused over 'give-away'

Mary Dejevsky
Paris

The disclosure at the weekend that yet another leading French company director is under judicial examination for corruption might have been met with the standard sigh of despair from a public already deeply cynical about top businessmen's mores. That the director concerned should be Jean-Luc Lagardère and the company the defence and media giant Matra-Hachette, however, promises a public outcry and embarrassment for the government.

It is barely two weeks since the government announced the choice of Mr Lagardère and Matra to take over the public communications and technology company Thomson. The terms of the deal, under which Matra would acquire Thomson for a symbolic one franc and sell its subsidiary, Thomson Multimedia, on to the South Korean company, Daewoo, for a similar sum, infuriated public opinion and unleashed a torrent of often xenophobic fury against the "give-away" of French assets to foreigners. The government has been forced to concede a parliamentary debate before the decision is made final.

Into this mood of extreme hostility came the revelation that Matra's chairman, Mr Lagardère, had been placed under judicial investigation for corruption on 28 October, that is 12 days after the sale of Thomson was announced.

The details were published in *Le Monde*, which Mr Lagardère says he intends to sue. While the Matra chairman said the investigation related to a case brought by a shareholder in connection with the terms of the Matra takeover of the media company Hachette four years ago, *Le Monde* claimed that it



Jean-Luc Lagardère: Under investigation for 'corruption'

includes false-accounting, fraud and abuse of public money.

A judicial investigation in France does not necessarily mean that charges will be laid, but it inevitably tarnishes the reputation of the person concerned, requires him to be questioned by a judge, and may entail "preventive custody" if a judge so rules.

The disclosure that Mr Lagardère is under investigation so soon after his company was chosen to buy Thomson is embarrassing enough for the government. But he is the second government-picked director to find himself in this position. The head of the national railway company, SNCF - Loïc Le Foch-Frémont - had to resign this summer after only six months in office, after being placed under investigation and held in prison for alleged corruption while head of another nationalised company, Elf Aquitaine.

That case is still pending, as are corruption investigations into the activities of at least another dozen senior company directors, including those of Renault, Alcatel-Asthom and one of the biggest lottery companies, Française des jeux.

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Clinton talks the language of history

Rupert Cornwell
San Antonio, Texas

Those nightmare-haunted members of Bill Clinton's Secret Service detail, charged with keeping the leader of America and the free world out of harm's way, have discerned a new threat to their man. They call it "scratching".

Everyone knows this President adores plunging into crowds. These days, on his electoral progress around the country, he doesn't so much shake hands, but holds forth his arms for people to grab like life rafts for shipwreck survivors. "I touched him three times. Three times, would you believe," Lebeche Ohene, a Ghanaian-American worker county employee said in ecstasy after a rally in Las Vegas last Thursday, as Mr Clinton worked the lines for fully 40 minutes.

It can be risky. In El Paso the next day, he leant so far that his feet became entangled with the bottom rope and the Secret Service men had to prevent him falling over. But that doesn't keep the "scratching" at bay. They are the ultimate souvenir hunters, content not merely to touch their target, but to take

'When they shut the government I thought about the Alamo. I would not give in,' roared the President

a piece of him home, in the form of a tiny fleck of skin.

Beyond that, anxiety exists in the Presidential entourage at an eleventh-hour narrowing in the polls, it has been scarcely visible. In this seven-day swing across the country, the crowds have been large - as at the heavily Hispanic New Mexico town of Las Cruces on Friday evening when half the local population of 70,000 turned out to see him. "Su voto es su voz," said a huge banner by the podium, reflecting the main concern of the White House at this late stage of the game: that, whether from boredom with an election that has seemed a foregone conclusion for months or from disgust with the seamy campaign finance shenanigans that have been making headlines for days, people will simply not bother to turn out on Tuesday.

But a good show can help. On a crisp evening, Las Cruces was a floodlit fiesta at the local

THE US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

university campus, warmed by a high school band playing "La Bamba" and the "Macarena". The President began with a few words in what seemed to be Spanish. What was he talking about, I asked a colleague from the Spanish news agency EFE. "I couldn't understand a word of it," she said.

But no matter. In English also, Mr Clinton can be incomprehensible - not the words that gush forth in an unstoppable tide, but the point he is trying to convey. Suddenly, for instance, he will switch from the 300-year-old blood feuds of "my ancestors in Ireland" to the miracles of modern science.

"We know there are two genes which cause breast cancer," he told a Halloween night crowd in Oakland, California. "We know that for the first time in history laboratory animals with their lower spines completely severed have shown movement in their lower limbs because of nerve transplants from other parts of their body."

What on earth has this to do with Bob Dole and November 5. Then you realise. The operative word is history. This is a President seeking his place in history, a link between America past and the America to come.

In Arizona, he seeks the mantle of Lincoln and Teddy Roosevelt, enlightened Republicans both. Here on the old Texas frontier he addresses 10,000 or more in front of a certain white-washed and well-known church in the middle of San Antonio. Mr Clinton, though, is deep into history as he talks about the winter's budget battle with modern-day Republicans.

Wasn't the episode a case study in White House manoeuvring, guided by the nightly tracking polls? Not a bit of it. "When they shut the government I thought about the Alamo. I wouldn't give in," the President roared. Over his grey-white coiff, for an instant, hovered Davey Crockett's coon-skin cap.

And then into the crowds and doubtless more "scratching" before the show rolled on: to Arkansas, Louisiana, Florida, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, all in the space of 36 hours, in the hope of picking up a traditionally Republican state, or helping a threatened Democratic Congressional candidate. At the end of it surely lies Mr Clinton's own victory. But unlike the crowds which have flocked to him, that victory now may ring strangely empty.



John Lichfield

Despite the narrowing of opinion polls in the final days, Bob Dole has a seemingly insurmountable electoral mountain to climb to win the US presidency tomorrow.

Our map, based on local polls taken in the last 10 days, shows President Bill Clinton strongly ahead in 23 states and his challenger leading clearly in eight. Of the 10 largest states, six, including the top two, California and New York, are

Dole surveys a bleak battleground

squarely in the Clinton camp. Only Texas and North Carolina are leaning to Mr Dole. State polls lag several days behind national polls, which show a move from Mr Clinton and towards Mr Dole and Ross Perot. A number of states in the West, Midwest and South, shown here as leaning to Mr Clinton, may have become more competitive in the final

straight. None the less, a Dole victory would be extraordinary, surpassing even Harry Truman's pundit- and poll-defying triumph in 1948.

US presidential elections are decided not by shares of the nation-wide vote but by votes won in the electoral college. Each state gets votes roughly according to population (actually according to the number of

Senators and members of Congress). The first past the post in the popular vote in each state scoops all its votes in the electoral college. To win the presidency, a candidate needs 270 of the 538 college votes.

The map suggests that - as of the end of last week - Mr Clinton had commanding leads in enough states to give him a narrow victory in the electoral col-

lege: 23 states worth 278 college votes. He was ahead by three points or more in 32 states, enough to give him an electoral-college landslide of 383 votes.

Compared to our earlier maps, Mr Dole has consolidated his hold on part of the Republican base in the South and West. He was ahead in 16 states in all, comfortably ahead in eight. But the 16 states yield an

electoral-college harvest of 135 electoral-college votes, half of what he needs to win. To win, Mr Dole has to take all the white and blue states on the map, all the pink (Clinton-leaning) and one medium-sized (strong Clinton) red state. Some of the "pink" states - Ohio, Colorado, Oregon - were reported yesterday by local pollsters to be slipping away from the President. But it remained improbable that Mr Dole could paint the map blue in the final hours of the campaign.

Republicans likely to hold on to power in Congress

Rupert Cornwell
As President Clinton's lead diminishes in these closing days of the campaign, prospects are receding that the Democrats will regain control of Congress - and thus be able to close down the many Capitol Hill investigations into White House ethics that threaten to bedevil a second term.

As recently as a week ago, when the President was ahead of the Republican challenger, Bob Dole by as much as 18 per cent in some polls, the Republicans' two-year reign in Congress looked as if it might be rudely and quickly ended. Now, however, the party is widely expected to cling to a majority in the House of Representatives, and even increase its 53-47 edge in the Senate.

On balance, yesterday's crop of polls shows Mr Clinton clearly ahead. But the margin is shrinking - to 13 per cent according to CNN/USA Today and as little as 3.8 per cent in a Reuters/Zogby survey - and a potential landslide has turned into what could be a near repeat of 1992, when Mr Clinton prevailed by 5 per cent in the popular vote and by 370 to 168 votes in the electoral college.

In recent elections, Presidential coat-tails have rarely been long. Now the drumbeat of scandal over seamy Democratic

fundraising practices has indirectly rekindled the familiar issues of Clinton ethics and "character", and made them shorter still.

With 34 seats in contention this year, the Democrats need a net Senate gain of only three, assuming a Clinton victory on Tuesday that would leave Vice President Al Gore with the decisive casting vote in the event of a tie. In practice though, all

Senator since 1932. Adding to the pressures of history are those of the religious right: the Christian Coalition of Pat Robertson yesterday was aiming to distribute 45 million "voter guidance" leaflets at churches throughout the country, which though technically non-partisan leave little doubt that on ethical and "family value" grounds, Bob Dole is infinitely to be preferred to Bill

Clinton. In the Bible-belt south especially, the White House is worried that the leaflet campaign could damage not only the President but also other Democrats on the ticket.

In other fiercely contested seats as well, no Democrat can feel secure. In Massachusetts, Senator John Kerry may have opened up a slight lead over the Republican Governor William Weld thanks to a strong candidates' debate performance last week. And the awed liberal Paul Wellstone - once the Republicans' prime target for a gain - now looks as if he will retain his seat in Minnesota.

Elsewhere however Republicans are faring better. In North

Scandal over seamy Democratic fundraising has rekindled the issues of ethics and character

Carolina, the former mayor of Charlotte, Harvey Gantt, is still underdog in his second attempt to unseat the arch-conservative Jesse Helms - which he must do if the Democrats are to have a realistic hope of recapturing the Senate. Next door in South Carolina, Strom Thurmond is all set to secure his eighth consecutive term at the tender age of 93. If he completes it, he would be first centennial Senator in US history.

In the House of Representatives also, the Republicans are confident of keeping control after a period last month in which their 19-seat majority seemed ripe for the snatching. Now however, enough of the 70 Republican new members of 1994, whose radical conservatism stamped the 104th Congress, look safe enough to ensure that Newt Gingrich remains Speaker in the 105th. As in the Senate, the Republicans are banking on further gains in the south to cushion losses in the rest of the country.

In addition 11 state governorships are at stake this week. No dramatic changes are in the offing, but the Democrat Jeanne Shaheen is poised to become the first woman Governor in New Hampshire's history, while in Washington state, Gary Locke is favourite to become the first the country's first Asian-American Governor.

Ex-communists head for defeat in Bulgaria and Romania

Adrian Bridge
Central Europe Correspondent

Voters in Bulgaria and Romania went to the polls yesterday in presidential and parliamentary elections that seemed certain to result in setbacks for both countries' ruling former communists.

Early projections in Bulgaria indicated that Petar Stoyanov, the staunchly anti-communist presidential candidate of the opposition Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), had defeated his former communist rival Ivan Marazov, by more than 20 per cent.

In Romania, where polling stations remained open later, the ruling Party of Social Democracy (PDSR) - the successor to the Communist Party - was expected to be defeated by the opposition Democratic Convention, heralding the first transfer of political power since the 1989 overthrow and execution of the country's former communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu.



Early return: A mother and child vote in Bulgaria. Photograph: Amel Emric/AP

Iraq attacks Washington 'missile lies'

David Usborne
New York

The United States confirmed yesterday that the pilot of an F-16 fighter jet fired a missile at a radar site in southern Iraq, while Baghdad accused Washington of inventing details of the incident to boost President Bill Clinton's standing before Tuesday's presidential election.

The White House said the pilot, who was patrolling the southern no-fly zone imposed on Iraq, took the action on Saturday after his aircraft was apparently "illuminated" by the radar. Illuminations are often a precursor to attack by ground-based missiles. "Such American allegations are baseless," an Iraqi foreign ministry spokesman said. "No incident has occurred in Iraqi airspace." He added: "Fabricating this false news is part of the US election campaign, the US style."

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The battle to save Yeltsin's heart

Last-resort treatment gives new lease of life

Liz Hunt
Health Editor

The coronary artery bypass operation is one of the most common and successful procedures in modern surgical practice. Each year, more than 10,000 people undergo the operation in the UK and in most cases are restored to a relatively active life, free from the pain and physical disability and reliance on drugs which will have dominated their lives as their heart disease became more severe.

President Boris Yeltsin is unlikely to be an exception. Any major operation under general anaesthetic poses risks, and the risks are higher the older and more fragile the patient. His underlying state of health is a factor and Mr Yeltsin's *bona fides* excesses which have contributed to the narrowed coronary arteries now depriving his heart of blood, will also have been taken into account.

However, he is undoubtedly a strong man, and comments by Dr Michael DeBakey, the American heart surgeon who has been consulted by the President's doctors, suggests that his chances of recovery are 95 per cent or higher.

A coronary bypass is essentially a mechanical diversion of blood from the narrowed or blocked coronary arteries sup-



DeBakey: Expert adviser

plying the heart, by grafting on to the organ additional "new" blood vessels. The operation is a treatment of last resort for patients in whom weight loss, dietary changes, stopping smoking, drugs and other medical interventions, such as balloon angioplasty to unblock the artery, have failed.

The operation requires a minimum of two surgeons and takes five hours or more. Initially, an incision is made in the patient's chest and the tissues parted to reveal the breastbone which is then split using a power saw. This action takes about 10 seconds. The heart is then revealed and the surgeon will open the pericardium, the membrane surrounding the pulsating muscle. A length of vein is removed from the leg, which

will be used for the bypass procedure.

Before any further incisions are made, the patient will be connected to a heart-lung machine which takes over the function of these organs. The heart is then temporarily stopped with an injection of potassium solution, and its temperature reduced with ice-cold, saline solution to protect the cells from damage.

One end of the section of leg vein is sewn on to the aorta, the main artery transporting oxygenated blood away from the heart, and the other end to a point below the site of the blockage in the coronary artery. If more than one artery is blocked, then other sections from the leg vein will be used.

Once the plumbing is in place, the patient is disconnected from the heart-lung machine, and his own heart given an electrical jump-start. As the blood starts flowing through it again, the surgeon will watch to see if the grafts are leaking. If all is well he will wire up the breastbone, and suture the chest.

The next 24 hours are critical as the patient is susceptible to haemorrhaging and the heart may go into "shock". Most patients spend two to four days in intensive care, another 10 to 12 on a ward. Some are back at work within six weeks.



Yeltsin: Faces a five-hour coronary bypass operation

'Cardiovascular Tolstoy' who is Boris's best hope

Phil Reeves
Moscow

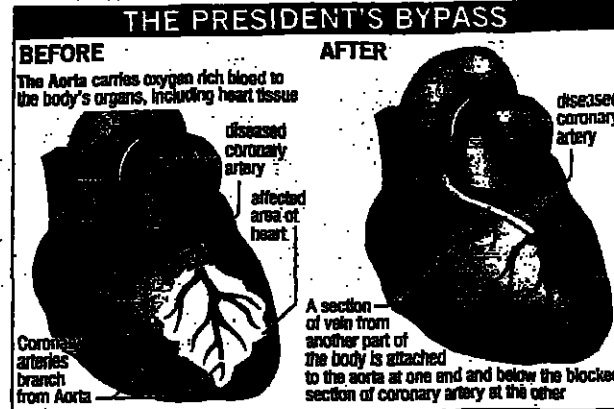
The life of Boris Yeltsin, and the political fate of his troubled country, will soon rest in the nimble hands of a top Kremlin doctor and his 88-year-old mentor, an American super-star cardiologist. Less than a decade after the end of the Cold War, East and West will together fight to mend the heart of a Russian leader.

Dr Renat Akhchurin once studied under Dr Michael DeBakey, and is still convinced that his teacher was the "Leo Tolstoy of cardiovascular surgery".

Dr DeBakey flew into Moscow yesterday for a meeting with Mr Yeltsin's surgeons to decide exactly when they will operate on the president's heart, which has four partially or totally blocked coronary arteries. Kremlin officials, who whisked the doctor away before he could talk to journalists, have not named a date - and may even keep it under wraps until the operation is complete.

Mr Yeltsin's heart illness has brought together two unusual medical men. Dr Akhchurin, who will lead the operation, is one of a small team of surgeons that have cared for the Russian political elite since before the end of the Cold War.

As chance would have it, the



president's powers - including control of the nuclear button - will be transferred to one of Dr Akhchurin's former bypass patients, Russia's prime minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, for the duration of the operation. Last week a hale and hearty-looking Mr Chernomyrdin made a special appearance on television, first windsurfing and then playing an accordion.

Dr Akhchurin's mentor, Dr DeBakey, is not expected to wield a scalpel. Apart from his unacknowledged role as an international monitor, whose presence should stifle any wild allegations of a plot if Mr Yeltsin dies, his main job is that of consultant.

No other cardiologist on the planet has more experience than Dr DeBakey. A workaholic who until recently thought nothing of an 18-hour day, he has operated on some 60,000 hearts, including those of European royals, Arab leaders and Hollywood stars.

As the Kremlin gears up for what may be one of the most nerve-wracking weeks in its history, its officials have been doing their best to appear unfurried.

But the most consistent source of reassurance has come from Dr DeBakey himself. He estimates at least a 95 per cent chance of success. No matter how good the odds, Russia and the world will wait with bated breath.

Chosen ones to select leader in HK

Stephen Vines
Hong Kong

The process for the "election" of Hong Kong's first Chief Executive, who will head the post-colonial government, is disintegrating into farce following the selection of the 400 members of the committee who will "elect" him.

The committee excludes all but a couple of mild critics of Chinese policy and gives overwhelming representation to pro-Peking parties, largely shunned by the electorate.

The majority of members are businessmen, including most of the colony's leading tycoons, some of whom have been selected in the category for "grass-roots" representatives. A number of the businessmen have criminal convictions.

China says the election procedure marks a new era in Hong Kong, replacing the British practice of high-handedly appointing a governor in London. This cannot be challenged, but critics, such as the Democratic Party legislator Yeung Sum, say the consultation is no more than the workings of a small inner circle who are impervious to popular opinion.

Chen Ziyang, a Chinese official responsible for Hong Kong affairs, insisted that the committee was broadly based. Speaking in Peking he said: "We have managed to have the representation of different levels of society in the different stages of the election process."

Names were put down for membership of the committee by 5,700 members of the Hong Kong public. The president of the Preparatory Committee, the Sino-Hong Kong body preparing for the change of sovereignty, whittled the list down to 409, of whom the full membership of the Preparatory Committee was allowed to vote for 340.

The other 60 were drawn from members of Chinese parliamentary bodies, including the influential businessman Tsang Hin-chi who has two criminal convictions. Another committee member is the flamboyant legislator and stockbroker Chim Pui-chung, who faces charges of forgery and fraud.

Among those who were not selected is the most prominent business leader with British connections, Li Shau-kei, who heads a subsidiary of Cable and Wireless. David Akers-Jones, a former chief secretary in the Hong Kong government and a vocal critic of Governor Chris Patten, is among a clutch of foreigners allowed to join the committee. In an indirect attack on the process, Mr Patten called on China to treat Hong Kong people like grown-ups.

significant shorts

UN official sacked for '£1.5m fraud'

An employee of Unicef has been charged with embezzlement after officials discovered a 12m kroner (£1.5m) fraud at the organisation's Danish offices. The 48-year-old Norwegian, who cannot be named, was sacked by the United Nations children's organisation last week and the case handed over to police. *Copenhagen - AP*

Court blow for Bhutto

Pakistan's Supreme Court dealt Benazir Bhutto, the Prime Minister, her most serious setback to date, returning to power a regional leader she had tried to oust. The ruling was interpreted as criticism of her tactics during her three years in power, providing more ammunition for opponents who accuse her of corruption and incompetence. The court made the restoration of Manzoor Wattoo as chief minister of Punjab conditional upon a vote of confidence in the provincial assembly. *Lahore - AP*

Murdoch tax report denied

Israel's Income Tax Commission denied a report in London's *Sunday Business* newspaper that a warrant had been issued for the arrest of the media magnate Rupert Murdoch in connection with a fraud investigation. "This is completely untrue," a spokeswoman said. A lawyer for Murdoch's News Datacom Research in Israel also denied a warrant had been issued. *Tel Aviv - Reuters*

Milosevic heads for poll victory

Yugoslavia held its first elections since the Dayton accords brought peace to Bosnia and analysts forecast that the coalition of Slobodan Milosevic, Serbian President, would triumph in the polling for a federal parliament and municipal authorities. Official results were not due before Thursday but unofficial returns early in the week were likely to indicate the outcome. *Belgrade - Reuters*

Divers find lost palace

Marine archaeologists have found and mapped the outlines of the sunken royal quarters of ancient Alexandria, scene of the drama between Cleopatra, Mark Antony and the Caesars. Frank Goddio, president of the European Institute of Marine Archaeology in Paris, said findings by his 16 divers overthrew old theories based on classical descriptions. "The exact topography of the vanished royal city can be identified for the first time," the institute said. *Alexandria - Reuters*

Whales charge shark net

Two whales charged at a shark net near Durban, South Africa, and ripped it apart to rescue their calf which was entangled in it. Mike Manning, a surfer, said the adults made repeated attempts to free it before charging. "I was a few metres away. The young one had been caught by its tail and was making a lot of noise," he added. *Durban - AP*

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The American century ends with a whimper

The US presidential campaign has finally generated a little excitement. The weekend polls suggest that the contest, for so long a foregone conclusion, is tightening. This was predictable. Poll numbers often narrow in the dying days of a presidential race. Talk of a Clinton landslide may have been premature but it is unlikely that the floating voters will float fast enough, or far enough, to rescue Bob Dole. The Republican challenger remains irrevocably behind in six out of the 10 largest states, from New York to California. He is ahead in only two. The probability is that Bill Clinton will triumph tomorrow and become the first Democrat to win back-to-back presidential elections since Franklin Roosevelt.

It is extraordinary that a man so detested by the right and the left, with such high negative ratings, and with such an unconvincing record in office, should become the most successful Democratic politician for half a century. Look again, and it is not so extraordinary. Only half the potential electorate – maybe, for the first time, less than half – will vote tomorrow. To win the greatest democratic office on earth in the late 20th century, you need to persuade one quarter of the American electorate to vote for you. As Abraham Lincoln might have said, you can't fool all of the people all of the time but one in four will do nicely.

Given the generally positive performance of the economy in the Clinton years – steady growth, low inflation, falling budget deficits – there was always a better than even chance that the President would achieve this woefully low electoral target. A more charismatic and wily opponent might have exacted a higher price for his early stumbles and for his dubious (if not merely political and financial manoeuvres) in both Washington and Arkansas. But Bill Clinton is a lucky politician and like all lucky politicians (Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher) he has been especially lucky in his opponents.

Bob Dole is a good and decent man. For many years, he stood out as a voice of managerial common sense in a Republican party increasingly prey to right-wing ideological fads and divisive social and ethnic hatreds. As a presidential candidate, he has been a dud. Even in the final days of the campaign, pollsters report that his support has a habit of falling when he visits a state. It is not supposed to happen that way.

Bob Dole has been running for president, formally speaking, for 18 months; in reality, most of his adult life. He has failed to explain what he would do in the office, other than occupy it with his usual lugubrious wisdom. This was never likely to be enough. Question: if US politics is as predigested, plastic and televisually scripted as everyone says it, how did the Republicans manage to



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nominate Bob Dole? The answer is that conservatism, which has dominated Republicanism for the last 20 years, is a spent force, or, at least, unable to throw up a convincing champion to replace Reagan.

That brings us to the other unwitting ally of Bill Clinton, Newt Gingrich, and his utterly deflated anti-government revolution. Gingrich's sweeping congressional victory two years ago was the President's lowest ebb; but also a godsend. Up to that point Bill Clinton had shown little sign of knowing how to govern, but he has always known how to campaign. The arrogance and hyper-

polism of Gingrich and his pals gave Clinton a platform from which to campaign against Republican extremism.

But where does that leave the United States? Gingrich sweeps to congressional power by campaigning against Clintonism; two years later Clinton is discredited by campaigning against Gingrichism. In 1992 Clinton was elected after promising to invent a kind of "lite" government, capable of delivering services (especially education, training and health care) without raising taxes. Two years later, Gingrichism swept to power, promising to dismantle government as usual and to release the

genius of the American people. After closing down government for a short while, Gingrichism is rejected and the US turns (in all probability) to a kind of Clintonian Super Lite, which promises to build a "bridge to the 21st century", without revealing much of where the piers of the bridge would stand.

It is a pretty depressing picture. For a man of such obvious energy and intelligence, the Clinton record of the last four years offers little enough to hope for in the next four. He deserves some credit for cutting the US federal budget deficit and for pushing through the Gatt and Nafta trade deals. Otherwise, his domestic policy has amounted to little and his foreign policy has been a kind of global Munchausen's Syndrome by Proxy, allowing crises to develop, resolving them with bursts of sometimes inspired energy, then demanding the credit.

Four years on, there is no Clinton Doctrine; no clearer picture of how the US can be relied upon to respond to a post-Soviet world.

The best that can be said is that Clinton has been a muddled president for a muddled age. Better that, perhaps, than the various models of Republican or Democratic protectionism and isolationism that might have been on offer. Better that than the moral absolutism and racial divisiveness of the Republican right.

The best that can be hoped from a Clinton Two – if such it is to be – is a clearer and steadier foreign policy and some incremental advances on domestic problems, from health care to education (if the Congress permits).

The worst that can be feared is a rerun of Nixon's second term, mired from the beginning in debilitating self-defence against allegations of sleaze. Either way, it is difficult to imagine an inspiring close to the American century.

The stuffed shirt challenge

You can see them coming a mile off. Their slightly crumpled collars are too tight for chubby necks. There's maybe a dribble of custard down the tie from an over-generous portion of spiced dick. That tired suit would benefit from a few days' hanging out on the line. And those well-polished brogues are, frankly, museum pieces.

No, we're not thinking about shabby teachers, whose dress sense Conservatives MPs rushed to condemn this weekend. We're talking about those self-same Tories who have done for shirts what taxidermists did for the gorilla. Our message is simple: it's time for Tory MPs to get unstuffed.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Love is the key to good childcare

Sir: Dr G A Butcher (letter, 28 October) accuses parents, particularly mothers, of abusing their children by leaving them with a child-minder or at a nursery whilst going to work.

My wife returned to work following the birth of our daughter. The worries and doubts she experienced were removed when upon leaving her at the child-minder she was waved off with a beaming smile and met with an equally beaming smile upon her return – which has continued over the 13 months since.

If the child knows it is loved by both parents and liked dearly by the child-minder, then this will produce a well-balanced child. Women have the right to return to work, and some have little choice, in order to provide for the child that they are supposed to be abusing.

DAVID HARMAN
Teddington, Middlesex

Sir: A better start in life may help young people to learn the difference between right and wrong, to benefit from education and avoid crime. Yet the message from Government and Opposition is to encourage jobs for mothers and provision of more child care and after-school clubs.

Mothers at home are ignored in the tax and benefit systems. We urge the transferability of one partner's unused tax allowance to the earning partner. The present system encourages both partners to work outside the home and discourages full-time parents.

Nikki Frances-Jones (Letters 31 October) refers to the system in France. Many French parents choose to remain in the home. They receive the allowances and tax relief that she mentions, and keep them themselves, rather than paying for child-care. Nursery schools and after-school clubs should be primarily for the benefit of the child not the parents.

FRANCES SLAVIN
Chairman, Full Time Mothers
London SW3

Sir: You gave the feminists a bell in your tabloid section on 30 October: wife-bashing Gaza supplemented by mothers with tearful tales of male infidelity and absent fathers. I know the other side of the picture, through work with Families Need Fathers and my own experience. This is a tale of infidelity and cruelty, too (not physical cruelty, the only form that feminists will acknowledge, since they succeed better at other kinds). It is also a tale of fathers (neither wife-bashing nor unfaithful) desperately wanting to continue relationships with their children and being denied by the courts or their ex-wives.

Articles quoting the standard statistics on fathers losing touch with their children never investigate a common reason: inability to bear the pain at seeing the relationship become increasingly tenuous on the day or half-day per fortnight typically allowed. In single-father circles there is a name for the situation – the hamburger father.

IAN HUGO
Reading, Berkshire

Sir: Your editorial of 29 October sets out all the reasons to celebrate marriage in terms of social policy and personal happiness. But why does it also deserve a better break in fiscal terms? Single people are



already discriminated against fiscally compared with married couples with no dependants – no access to the spouse's pension rights, and no exemptions for inheritance tax.

Would it not be better to concentrate fiscal benefits on all these, including married couples, who have caring responsibilities for children and dependent adults?

ROBERT H WHITTLE
Winchester

Sir: Many of us believe that football encourages drunken, violent and anti-social excesses, giving them a context in which to be seen as acceptable ("England's women expect... a wife-beater to stay in decent obscurity", 2 November). Now it's official.

SARA CLARKE
Hayfield, Derbyshire

Stop selling our public woods

Sir: The backdoor privatisation of our public woodlands continues despite John Major's election promise "not to privatise the Forestry Commission" and Ian Lang's Commons statement that "the FC woodlands should remain in the public sector".

In all, 2,680 public woodlands (46 per cent of the total) have been sold, only 48 with official public access agreements. Freedom to roam is invariably lost.

I urge your readers to pester the Prime Minister and their MPs so as to shame the Government into stopping this harmful sell-off of our much-loved and vital woodlands.

PHILIP GREIG
Swindon, Wiltshire

My 'counselling' after the war

Sir: I note that after each traumatic event or disaster, the papers and television announce that the victims are receiving counselling.

As we approach Remembrance Sunday, my thoughts go back to the last war – getting out at Dunkirk, later, as a prisoner of war, suffering the friendly fire from Allied bombers which killed some of my mates; watching the degradation and liquidation of the Jews; being on the "Death March" from Poland to Munich.

The only counselling I received on return to England was from a doctor on an airfield near Aylesbury, who, as I stood before him naked, showing him my badly set broken fingers and the multiple boils on my body, gave me a sympathetic smile.

No doubt the poor devils much worse off than us – the prisoners of the Japanese – received the same counselling. Could I, as a man of 78 years, having seen a bit of life, apply for the job of counsellor to the counsellors?

A WATKINSON
London E4

Egyptian torture

Sir: Again Robert Fisk has alerted us to the West's reluctance to criticise Egypt's treatment of dissidents ("Islamists punished in Egypt's cruel jails", 1 November).

GLYN ENGLAND
London SW3

However, he should have mentioned the only morally proper solution to the endless spiral of conflict between the regime and opposition groups in that country.

The Egyptian government and, it seems, its Western backers, believe that the Islamic wave can be defeated in the torture chamber. This policy is failing simply because no one has grasped the elementary lesson that religious movements are always strengthened rather than destroyed by persecution.

It is time the world pressed the secularist Arab regimes to include Islamic parties in the democratic process. The West must either permit the creation of moderate Islamic governments now, or face the probability that the pent-up frustration and hatred will lead to revolutions, whose leaders, their bodies bearing the scars of torture equipment supplied by the West, are unlikely to look upon the Western torch bearers of democracy and human rights with much admiration.

HOSSEIN OWEIDA
London N3

Pots and kettles

Sir: You report Ian Lang as questioning the mandate of the Communication Workers' Union because less than half of those eligible to vote had supported action (31 October). And the mandate of the Government?

GLYN ENGLAND
London SW3

A better way to rule London

Sir: Your report on the mayor of Barcelona makes interesting reading and I am pleased that *The Independent* used it to highlight the debate about the governance of London.

London is unique among major world cities in having no single elected city government or figurehead. Barcelona is certainly an inspiration. The Association of London Government has been campaigning for an elected strategic authority for London.

London is much bigger than Barcelona (seven million population compared with Barcelona's three million). It might be difficult for a mayor to always "be in the right place at the moment the citizens' wishes are expressed" or even single-handedly to bring together the partnerships and inward investment needed.

The big challenge, once a Labour government is elected, will be to define the role of the new strategic authority – and possibly an elected mayor – to work in harmony with the London boroughs, who will still be the ones providing services and making day-to-day decisions.

An elected mayor would be an exciting prospect for many Londoners and could certainly provide political leadership and a focus to regenerate civic pride, but he or she will need to listen to the public and other elected politicians

to help shape London's vision and direction.
Councillor TOBY HARRIS
Chair, Association of London Government
London SW1

Move on, King Richard I

Sir: As a class we have been studying King Richard I and the Crusades. We feel that the public have been misled for generations into believing that he was a hero. People even went so far as to erect a fine equestrian statue of him in front of the Houses of Parliament.

In view of our reservations, do your readers have any ideas on where the statue could be moved to?

JAMES ANDREWS
JONATHAN ASHLEY
THOMAS BARTON
NICHOLAS BERE
CHLOE BINDING
ELIZABETH CANTOR
KRISTINA CHAPPLE
LYDIA CORDIER
ELEANOR DUTTON
LUCINDA FLEMING
OLIVER HERINGTON
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KATE LOVERING
EDWARD MURPHY
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MIRANDA PRYNN
LETTIE RANSLEY
GANAN SRITHARAN
JACK WALTHAM
PHILIP WILSON
Form 74W, Dulwich Preparatory School
Cranbrook, Kent

Superstore threat to Welsh towns

Sir: Town centres in the Cotswolds can count themselves extremely lucky that seven local councils in the Cotswolds are prepared to exchange trading information in order to protect them from superstores ("There's still time to stop the life being sucked out of the loveliest small towns in Britain", 1 November).

Here in Wales the town centres face the twin evils of flimsy Planner Policy Guidance – leading to confusion and wished upon us by the Welsh Office – and the predominantly Labour councils which are still accepting enormous out-of-town superstore developments, even when it is patently obvious that they are threatening the town centre.

Highest development on the outskirts of Merthyr Tydfil will threaten town centres within a 30-mile radius, crippling Aberdare.

Large companies are now targeting small towns where they know that the combined trading population will not be in a financial position to take the decision to judicial review, which seems the only way to fight the situation.

It is time we had impact studies which follow the Japanese model, where those most likely to be affected by a developer have a say in the methodology of the impact study and an input into the date. This could be accomplished if money were forthcoming from government resources, and added to by the developer.

At present, impact studies paid for by those wishing to develop are grossly biased and government reorganisation in Wales has ensured that planning departments do not have the time to unravel the data.

JUDITH TOMS
Honorary Secretary
Aberdare and District Chamber of Trade and Commerce
Aberdare, Mid Glamorgan

Dome for AD2000 can use the sun

Sir: I read with interest Jonathan Glancey's article ("Not so much the millennium's Crystal Palace, more a post-modern hedgehog", 1 November) concerning the proposed Millennium Dome.

We should be marking the new millennium with a structure that incorporates the latest technologies.

One ideal technology that has been ignored in this proposal is the incorporation of solar photovoltaic technology into the skin of the building. This generates electricity from the sunlight and is ready and waiting to be deployed in the UK.

It is a technology that is clearly part of the solution to future energy use and has been specified by British architects for incorporation into the new German parliament building in Berlin.

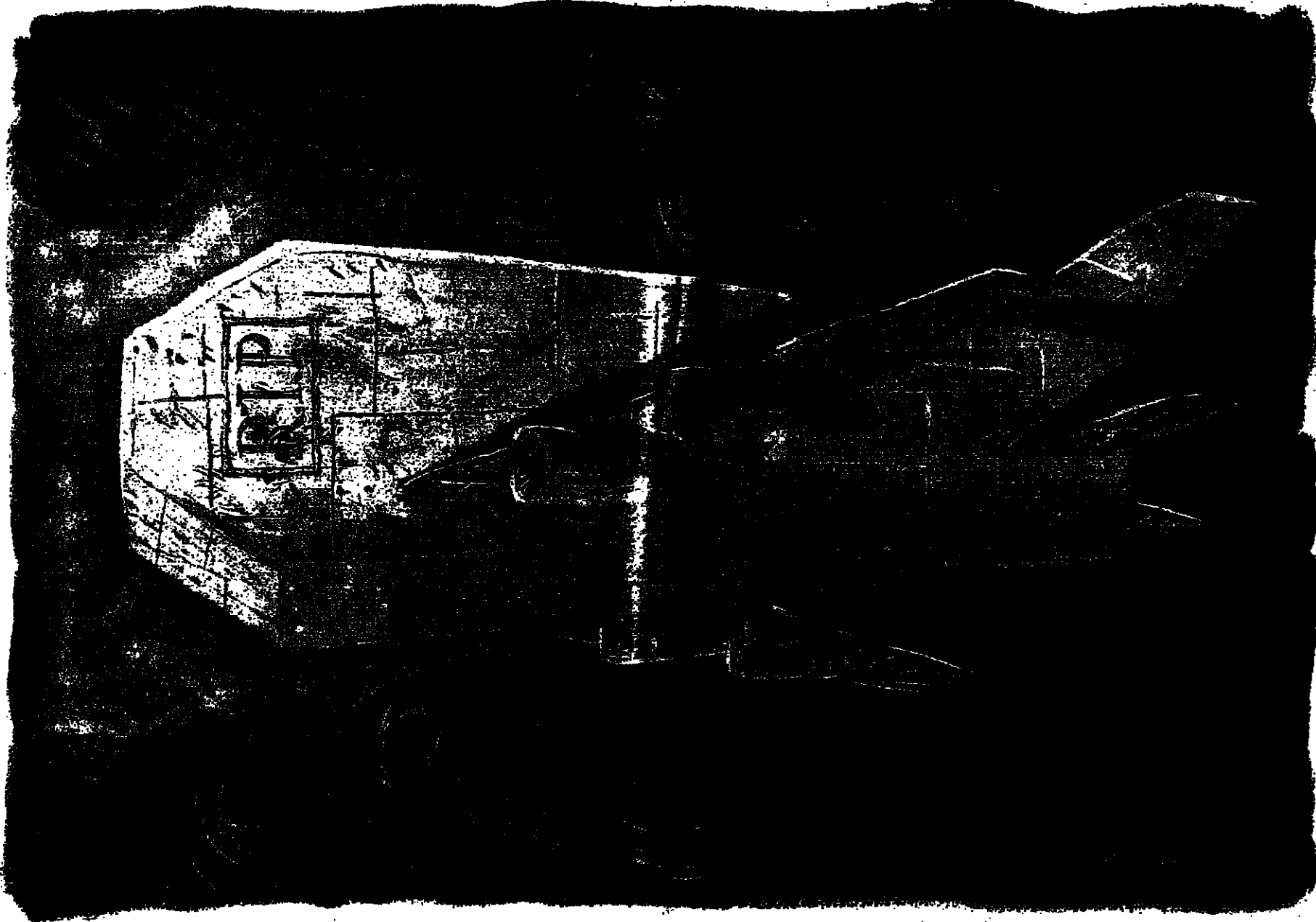
JULIA ROBINSON
London N8

Sir: What a comment on our age that we can build a huge new building with nothing – apart from the temporary exhibition – to go inside it.

This recalls the truth of the American writer who said: "It was the age that invented the loudspeaker which had nothing to say".
GRAHAM CAREY
Bingley, West Yorkshire

essay

This weekend tests were ordered on 2,000 Boeing 737s after several unexplained crashes. There are concerns, too, about the 747 jumbo jet. Christian Wolmar examines an industry that is losing the public's trust



How safe is your plane?

A safety crisis is looming in the world's airline industry. It arises at least partly out of a realisation that there probably was no bomb aboard the TWA Boeing 747 which plunged into the ocean three months ago, killing all 230 people on board. Instead, the investigators are focusing on a mechanical defect as the likely cause. And that is bad news for the aviation industry, the airline manufacturers and all who fly in planes.

Meanwhile, over the weekend, the Federal Aviation Administration ordered that all 2,000 Boeing 737s in the world's fleet should have tests on their rudders within the next 10 days. Although the trigger for this emergency measure covering the world's best selling commercial jet was the finding that the control mechanism could jam in a laboratory experiment, it follows years of concern about its rudder, culminating in a devastating series of articles on the 737's rudder

problems, published last week in Boeing's home town newspaper, the *Seattle Times*. Uncommanded rudder deployment, which can make the plane flip over in seconds, is the suspected cause of a number of accidents, including two unexplained crashes in Colorado Springs and Pittsburgh in the past five years.

As far as Flight 800 is concerned, it would be much easier for Boeing and the industry if a bomb had been responsible for its destruction. But the terrorism theory had been looking increasingly shaky, the longer no definite statement emerged from the investigation team into the disaster on 17 July. It would have taken only a small amount of by-product from an explosion to have enabled the investigators to conclude with certainty, as they did within days of the Lockerbie disaster, that terrorism had been involved. Yet no such finding has been made, and no group has claimed responsibility for blowing up the plane.

Bombs may be the act of men but they seem more like an act of God, out of our control and virtually impossible to prevent. They may deter a few people, especially American tourists, from flying, but, with a few promises of tighter airport security and the addition of a few more inane questions at the check-in desks, the airline industry normally bumbles along quite happily.

Technical defects are another matter entirely, as they raise fundamental questions about airline safety and the future of the industry. The cause of the Flight 800 accident has been traced to a fuel tank, located between the wings and beneath the cabin, which exploded. As the flight from New York to Paris was relatively short, the tank was nearly empty and something ignited the fuel vapours to cause the massive configuration. The possible targets are either a fuel probe in the fuel tank - though Boeing says that it does not carry sufficient current to cause a spark

- or a fuel pump which lay adjacent to the tank. Lawyers in New York, acting for 30 of the bereaved families, have produced a 27-page analysis, written by two experts, of the likely scenario which led to the crash. It centres on a fuel pump which produced the fatal spark, but, more important, it raises questions about the use of older aircraft by the world's airlines. The report says that, while the world's safety authorities have focused on the structure of ageing aircraft, "there were no programmes for old aircraft to evaluate systems, flight controls and fuel management. This appears to be a real void in the airworthiness standards of ageing aircraft. We respectfully suggest that the Federal Aviation Administration examine this problem."

There are an awful lot of older aircraft out there. Flight 800 was operated by a 25-year-old plane, the 153rd Boeing 747 to be built, out of a total approaching 1,100. Any changes that result from the investigation into TWA 800 could be prohibitively expensive, meaning that a lot of them may be grounded or scrapped. Even worse, the accident may have highlighted something wrong with the whole design of the aircraft, necessitating that all 1,083 built are modified.

Such a prospect would have catastrophic knock-on effects for the industry, which would grind to a halt: there are nearly 1,100 Boeing 747s - 700 of which are the classic type involved in this crash - and they are the workhorses of the industry. There is a recent precedent

programmes to improve future safety, such as trying to draw lessons from the 6,000 "mandatory occurrence reports" filed by British airlines every year, but Mike Bell, its head of technical services, admits that, while the CAA's target is to have "zero accidents", "it is getting more and more difficult to reduce the rate of accident, because there are very few and each one has individual characteristics." The lessons learned from previous accidents have been implemented, making it difficult to make further improvements. Mr Bell said: "Our team of six people finds it very difficult to agree on the primary cause of crashes. There are often seven or eight possible factors, and one can't decide which was the main one."

It's been a bad few weeks for aviation. In the past month, a 757 crashed at sea off the coast of Peru, a 707 freighter smashed into housing in Ecuador, and an Antonov 24 destroyed housing at the end of the runway in Turin, Italy. Only last Friday a Fokker 100 killed many people on the ground in São Paulo, Brazil. What makes these crashes even more worrying is that in all of them people were killed on the ground.

Predictably, all these accidents involve the riskier types of aircraft. Older planes, freighters, and Third World operators and airports, all have higher than average numbers of accidents. Yet many such planes - such as the Air Algérie freighter which crashed at Coventry in December 1994 - are allowed to fly into the UK. Jeff Gizzard leads a campaign against a second runway at Manchester airport and lives under the flight path. He said: "We are desperately concerned. It is time that certain types of aircraft, or some airlines, were banned from airports."

The one thing that would put paid to BAA's hopes of building Terminal Five at Heathrow, currently the subject of the longest ever planning inquiry, would be an accident in which Londoners are killed by a falling plane. It has been 24 years since the Staines disaster, when a Trident plunged into a field near the airport. Statistically, we are overdue for a falling plane. It was over due for a London air disaster and, if one were to occur, a lot of questions would be raised about whether we should allow the industry to grow unfettered.

Aviation safety is about perception. As you belt up before thundering along the runway, your chances of being killed are tiny and no greater than at any time in the past two decades. But that misses the point. The industry can go on endlessly about how it is safer than other forms of travel but it will be to no avail if aircraft fall out of the sky with the regularity of the past few weeks. There will be a backlash. People will not only no longer want to fly, they will not even want to live near airports. The industry has to find a way to improve again on safety rates, or else events such as TWA 800 and the various recent accidents which have killed people on the ground will lead to a crisis of confidence.

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£25,000+	3.72	3.75
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Up to £25,000	3.64	3.70
£25,000+	4.13	4.20
Treasurer Account		
Up to £2,000	1.00	1.00
£2,000+	1.25	1.25
£10,000+	3.21	3.25

Gross: The rate before the deduction of tax. CAR: Compound Annual Rate, or the true Gross return taking into account the frequency of interest payments. All rates quoted are per annum. With effect from the 31st October 1996 Base Rate has been increased by 0.25% to 6.00% p.a.



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Dirt, death, decay and old fingernails



Miles Kingston

I want to talk to you today about spring cleaning... Isn't this rather the wrong time of year? Not at all. But shouldn't you wait until spring to talk about spring cleaning? That is so typical of your lack of advance thinking! It's what's wrong with the country today. Why wait till the last moment? Do you wait till summer to discuss your summer holidays? Do you start thinking about

winter sports in January? Is Christmas Eve when you get down to Christmas planning? Is the age of 65 the time to start planning a pension...?

OK, OK, you've made your point, albeit, if I may say so, in a particularly heavy-handed way. So why do you want to talk about spring cleaning now?

Because autumn is, in many ways, the mirror image of spring. Both are periods of change and transition. Both are not so much seasons in their own right as looking forward to the next season. Winter and summer are solid states of mind, but spring and autumn are curtain-raisers, preludes, periods of anticipation or regret, times when we... Yes, yes, get on with it!

In spring we have April showers. In autumn we have the same sort of blustery, showery, changeable weather. In fact, we have been having it for the last few days.

True, April showers in October. Every year... The leaves have started to tumble, making a mess

everywhere. The October winds have blown down twigs, branches, bricks, slates, making even more of a mess everywhere.

Yes, it's true. We retreat indoors, leaving the playthings of summer on the lawn of life. Garden seats stay out in the rain, old cricket bats lie forgotten under the bushes, a football lies deflated under the rhododendron...

Gosh, we are poetic this morning! And what are we driving at, may I ask? You can't see? No. Can you?

Only this. That in springtime we clean, and we call it spring cleaning, and we have showers and we call them April showers. But in autumn we have the same showers and we have no name for them, and we have the opposite of spring cleaning, but we do not have a name for the process of getting the place in a mess!

You're saying that all the things we have to clean up in springtime are deposited in the autumn?

Partly that. But the crucial thing is that we don't give it

a name! We don't call it "autumn dithering"! We don't call them October showers! We ignore autumn and its true meaning. We avert our eyes from the implications of a dying season.

No, we don't. We admire the autumn tints and the beautiful leaves. In the USA, in Vermont, it is a whole industry. People flock to Vermont to see it. People in England go to arboretums in the autumn. We are very conscious of autumn!

On the contrary, it is another chance to fool ourselves. The only reason that the leaves change colour is that they are dying. You may call them autumn tints but they are death pangs to me, the last choking colour changes of leaves on their death bed - the leaves are sending out desperate farewell signals, and we stand there and say, "How nice!" We are averting our eyes again from reality. It's hypocrisy on a big scale!

It's wrong to admire the autumn leaves? It's wrong to think they're a symbol of beauty. They're not! They're a symbol of decay!

Autumn is all about decay and dirt and decline and blackberries shrivelled on the bush because nobody has picked them, and about dead-heading, and dismal darkness...

And harvest time? Don't give me the old Keatsian rubbish! "Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness" indeed! Season of mud and yellow rotting potato stalks, more like!

Hate it. Give me spring any time. Autumn is the time when nature throws out her rubbish, discards her old fingernails and dirty underwear, and we all stand there and look at the process and say, "How Very Very Lovely!"

Feeling better now you've got all that off your chest? Yes, thanks.

Good. Incidentally, why did you bring up the subject of spring cleaning? It gives me something to look forward to.

Thank you. Not at all.

This feature has been paid for by the Enemies of Autumn.

Why prize rows are good for art – and business

It would be a good idea, AN Wilson wrote in Friday's *Evening Standard*, if there were no more Booker prizes. The great majority of the 150 novels entered this year were of no quality, he said; the book he favoured as a judge (Berni Bishara's *Every Man For Himself*) did not win. There is a "silly dinner" and it is all a "commercial game". Publishers play this game because they think it will "help them sell books".

Oh my goodness, how dreadful, publishers want to sell more books – including, from time to time, Mr Wilson's own.

He is quite right in one sense. The Booker Prize does lift sales of the shortlisted entries and give a significant boost to the winner. Book-makers take bets, the "silly dinner" is televised, newspapers run many columns on the event and there is always an AN Wilson on hand to shudder in horror.

Controversy is an essential part of the formula. As a result the British public turns its attention for a short period to the notion of the novel in English. It is hard, surely, to deny that this is a good thing. And, because this is so, next January, when a further five distinguished literary experts are asked to form the judging panel for the 1997 award, they will agree, and the bandwagon will roll forward for another year.

We should recognise that the two big cultural prizes, the Booker for the English novel, which has just been announced, and the Turner Prize for a British artist, due to be awarded towards the end of this month, are both of them an extraordinary mix of art and business.

They are themselves subtle creations which have taken years to perfect. The exact terms of the competition, the nature of the shortlist, the timing of the announcements, the qualifications of the judges, the wishes of the sponsors – these are the elements which are blended together, I believe more or less successfully, for the advancement of public interest in the arts.

The Booker was set up in 1968, and it wasn't until 1980 that it reached a viable formula. Likewise, the Turner required nine years of refinement until, in 1993, with the award to Rachel Whiteread, it began to make a permanent place for itself in the public mind. That the Turner represents for many people the alchemy of modern art does not matter. That is what is expected. Its shortlist is always avant-garde in a way in which the Booker novels are not. The *Daily Express* headline on the Turner award a few years ago: "Has taking us for a ride become an art form?" perfectly captured its notoriety.



Andreas Whittam-Smith

The Booker and Turner prizes may not always be awarded to the right people – but they do sell books and goad the public into discussing art

work. There is a further difficulty which arises from the position of the Tate itself, the founder and organiser of the prize. Unlike the Book Trust, which is a neutral administrator of the Booker, the Tate is by miles the most important contemporary art institution in this country. It has a view.

This means that the identity and standing of the jury, and its independence, are of great importance. Yet when you look at this year's members, other than Nicholas Serota, the director of the Tate Gallery, who is also chairman of the jury, they are unknown. They impart no reassurance. I doubt whether one in a thousand of those who visit the exhibition of the work on the shortlist will have heard the names of any of the judges, except that of Mr Serota.

Who would I like to see on the jury in place of this year's obscure experts? Here are three for starters: Charles Saatchi, Brian Sewell, Lucien Freud.

My advice to people who share this view is to go this month to the Tate, if possible, and view the work of this year's shortlisted artists. I would be very surprised if they did not thoroughly enjoy the exhibition, albeit that one of the entries is a video installation, another is a series of wonderful photographs by an artist who absurdly refuses to call himself a photographer, and a third includes maps and diagrams and three white yachting sails rigged on metal stands, each bearing the name and date of a literary figure.

Nevertheless, both the Booker and the Turner do have flaws which need attention.

It is remarkable that in 27 years nobody has won the Booker prize more than once. A whole generation of novelists has gone by without successive juries of literary experts coming to the conclusion that one or two should be elevated above the rest.

Selma Rushdie was the winner in 1981 with *Midnight's Children* and has been on the shortlist three times subsequently, with *The Satanic Verses*, *Shame*, and *The Moor's Last Sigh*. Kingsley Amis had one win and two shortlistings. It seems that the judges are seized by a very British sense of fair play. They don't say out loud: "Can't give it to Salman, he's won it already"; instead they find other reasons for passing it round.

The Turner Prize has more serious problems. It is awarded to a British artist under 50 for outstanding work in the previous 12 months. What purpose does the age limit serve? Being set in middle age, it does not specifically encourage young artists. It seems to be saying, but cannot mean to do so, that artists aged over 50 are unlikely to be producing outstanding work.

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Will Parliament resist Rupert's grip?

by Polly Toynbee

New readers start here. In a few days the Department of Trade and Industry will finally publish a set of regulations for controlling digital television and Murdoch's potential monopoly of it. Digital television is the wave of the future. It offers wide-screen and multi-channel interactive television, where you can bank, book tickets and summon up any film or archive programme via your TV and a phone line.

BSkyB is now ordering digital boxes from manufacturers that will be exclusively for its own use. These boxes will not have a switch to allow other systems to attach themselves. Nor will the slots in these boxes be made compatible to take decoder cards for other systems. That means any broadcaster wanting to go digital will have to use Murdoch's gateway, on his terms, at his price, to be regulated by Ofcom, which has no broadcasting experience.

The BBC, ITV and others are lobbying for Murdoch to be forced to franchise out his technology to anyone who wants it at a fair price so that anyone can manufacture universal boxes. This is now the key issue. Unless action is taken, all broadcasters will have to use Murdoch's gateway.

The government line is: they are doing everything humanly possible to ensure that Murdoch does not have a monopoly. Briefings from the DTI seem to have been seductive, full of difficult jargon and disingenuous promises of utter incomprehension at what all this fuss is about. Trust them. Alarmingly, politicians on both sides seem to be doing just that.

The DTI has two lines of argument – one is that regulations already in place does most of what is necessary. The second is to hide behind a European directive, claiming that tougher regulation would not be legal. Both claims are substantially untrue. The French are introducing very tough regulation of every aspect of the gateway. We could too. The Government's silent obedience to an extreme interpretation of a European directive squares oddly with the anti-European protests it stirs up on other issues.

The regulations about to be published say only that Murdoch may be forced to franchise out his technology to broadcasters at some point in the future (too late), if all else fails. There is time to change that, just, and make it compulsory at once.



If the digital TV regulations are passed, Murdoch's monstrous coup will be complete. Do our MPs have the mettle to stop him?

Now we shall test the resolve of politicians to do the right thing. MPs can oppose the regulations and refuse to endorse such a monstrous monopoly. However, since the House of Commons boasts barely an MP with an engineering degree, DTI jargon is easily spoon-fed to them. The passage of the Broadcasting Act 1996, which fudged this issue, can be read as a case study in the power of Murdoch to intimidate politicians.

The Labour Party protests its innocence. What could they have done, with no majority in

the House? Lewis Moonie, Labour's spokesman on broadcasting, and Jeff Hoon, Labour's DTI spokesman, wrote an indignant letter to *The Independent* on Saturday, denying any suggestion that Labour acquiesced in allowing Murdoch his monopoly. They say they always argued for his system to be forced to be compatible with others and if the forthcoming regulations fall short of this they will fight it in the House. Good.

But at the committee stage of the Broadcasting Bill something odd happened. Tory MP Roger

Gale put forward a crucial amendment to guarantee open access to all broadcasters and a common interface in every box. Gale had the support of one other maverick Tory in the committee, David Shaw. But when the amendment came to a vote, they were appalled to find that two Labour members of the committee were mysteriously missing. It was tied 11-11, when it should have been 11-13 for, and thus it fell. So a guarantee of fair access to the digital future was lost. A serious cock-up by Labour? Who knows? Once an

amendment is defeated in a committee, it cannot be put again on the floor of the House. Had it passed, observers believe that the Government would not have tried to overturn it in the House.

What does Moonie say about the crucial vote? Various different things: "The amendment was over-prescriptive, a matter better left to secondary legislation (the regulations)". He also says: "We were not particularly bothered as we thought we had a better deal on the regulations." Touching faith by a Labour MP in a DTI led by deregulators and apostles of big business. Why did Labour not ensure that everyone was there for a vote it was supporting? "Maybe we got caught short. It does happen. I can see how it might have looked. I never thought we were going to win that amendment." Even though it was moved by a Tory?

Interviewed in this paper last week, Lewis Moonie said he was satisfied with government "cast-iron assurances" on the DTI's forthcoming regulations. He added: "This idea that Murdoch is going to flood the market with cheap trash is a condescending middle-class idea – the idea that you've got to protect people from this stuff."

This remark falls so far short of understanding what all this is about that it is, frankly, frightening. No one wants to stop Murdoch putting out any channels he chooses, trash or not. This battle is about stopping Murdoch from preventing others broadcasting on equal terms.

Odd innuendoes of blame are seeping out of the Tory side. After all, whether Labour did or did not fumble this, the pro-Murdoch government is primarily to blame. But now Downing Street is whispering wickedly that it was Michael Heseltine when he was President of the Board of Trade at DTI who at the crucial moment sold the pass to Murdoch to further his own imperial ambitions, hoping for the support of the Murdoch press.

However, parliamentary sins – of omission and commission – are history. There is still time for all those MPs who care about a free future to reclaim their honour. Both parties need to be kept under the closest scrutiny when these regulations are published. Murdoch must be forced to franchise the set-top technology immediately. Any MP who does not vote accordingly (or conveniently fails to turn up to vote) has to be counted a lousy and a traitor to the cause of free television competition.

Blair's fresh prescription

Labour's NHS plans are on top form, says Chris Smith

In his article about Labour's policies on health ("Is the NHS safe under Dr Blair's team?", 30 October), Jack O'Sullivan accuses us of idly resting on our laurels and allowing the Tories to steal the show on health.

He clearly did not listen to the debate we had on the floor of the House of Commons on Friday week, when we put Stephen Dorrell on the spot on a series of issues, ranging from the provision of salaries in inner-city areas to the dangers of commercial companies offering GP services (and in the process destroying the professional nature of the doctor-patient relationship). We are not giving the Tories an easy ride, and we intend to increase the pressure as we approach the election.

Mr O'Sullivan's principal complaint would appear to be that he detects no fresh thinking, no sign of innovation, from Labour. The NHS under Labour, he says, would not be very different from its condition under the Tories. I beg to disagree.

We don't want to overturn everything in a grand upheaval, certainly. Everyone in the health services has told us that is the last thing they want or need. But we do want to make changes, because the introduction of the competitive internal market has caused immense damage. It has set hospital against hospital, doctor against doctor. It has removed the central principle of equity of access from the health service. It has meant that decisions often have to be taken on the basis of what the contract says, rather than what is best for the patient. And it has generated enormous amounts of unnecessary bureaucracy.

Yes, we want to retain the division of responsibility between those who order care and treatment for patients and those who deliver it. That is a commonsense division; but we would want it to lead to a system based on co-operation and collaboration,

where doctors, hospitals and health authorities would sit down together to agree a forward programme of treatment for their patients – not only for a year, but for several years ahead. That would transform the Tories' competitive ethos.

Two days ago, I visited Great Ormond Street Hospital to see something of the fantastic work they are doing in a highly specialised field. But in order to carry out a year's work, they must have contracts with 60 different health authorities and with 1,500 different fundholding GP practices. This is not a sensible way of delivering high-quality paediatric care.

We won't overturn everything, but we do want to make changes

to those children who need it. A competitive market system simply isn't appropriate.

It is all too easy, however, to get stuck in a sterile debate about structures. We want to move to more sensible co-operation, but we also want to move the debate about the future of health care in Britain forward. For example, we want to appoint a Minister for Public Health, working across government departments, looking at everything from the banning of tobacco advertising to the establishment of nutritional standards for school meals.

Second, we envisage the development of a recuperation service, to help people recover from major treatment in a supported environment near to their home, rather than being forced out of hospital too early. Third, our

proposals for the reform of information technology organisation within the health service (coupled with the development of nationwide, broadband communication) could enable expert medical advice to be brought directly to neighbourhood GP level.

Fourth, there is our proposal to use savings from excessive bureaucracy to fund, among other things, a reduction in waiting times for surgery for cancer – so lightly dismissed by Mr O'Sullivan.

This will not only remove an enormous amount of distress and trauma for thousands of patients, it will also change fundamentally the present government's approach to waiting-list reductions, which appears to be based simply on time rather than on need or degree of pain.

Finally, the importance we attach to measuring properly the effectiveness and quality of NHS treatment offers the prospect of achieving better value for money out of our health expenditure.

We need to recognise that health is not something that is simply dependent on good hospitals and doctors and primary care, important though these all are. Health also depends fundamentally on factors such as poverty, or inadequate housing, or a polluted environment. It is a stark statistic that those people born into the poorest tenth of the population have a life expectancy eight years less than those born into the wealthiest tenth.

Inequality of income and condition has a major impact on the quality of people's health, and inequality has widened dramatically over these past 17 years. We want to begin to put that right in government.

The NHS is too important to be tossed aside in one dismissive article. It needs a change of government to take it imaginatively forward into the future.

The writer is Shadow Secretary of State for Health.

At last, Ffyona becomes human

I never really liked Ffyona Campbell. Something about her self-contained character, her drivenness, her prickliness, meant that, despite admiring her 19,500-mile trek on foot around the world, I could not like her for it: there was nothing there I could identify with.

And when she returned from that mammoth – and curiously pointless – odyssey, it seemed she had got no nearer to being at ease with herself. Unlike the journeys of, say, Alison Hargreaves, the adventure seemed to offer her no satisfaction – and thus diminished our enjoyment of it.

When the news emerged yesterday that she had confessed to sitting in her back-up van for 1,000 of those miles, I expected to like her even less. It's cheating, after all, and as footballer Diego Maradona and sprinter Ben Johnson discovered to their cost, no one likes – or forgives – a cheat.

And yet, somehow Ffyona Campbell has suddenly become a more interesting and sympathetic figure. There can be no one who hasn't cheated at some point, no one who, despite their achievements, hasn't waited for that tap on the shoulder.

Ffyona cheated, according to her autobiography, because of the pressure on her to succeed – from her sponsors, the public, and, more importantly, from her father, whose approval she "lived" for.

Endurance walking was the only thing to give her a sense of pride: when an unplanned pregnancy meant that she could not do that, she cheated because she could not bear to fail.

"I destroyed the only truth around

which my own sense of right and wrong had pivoted and, since I could not trust myself, I wasn't able to trust anyone else," she wrote. No wonder she proved a difficult heroine; her spikiness was an understandable reaction to the knowledge that she hadn't done the very thing for which she was being lauded.

And now, after a more than a year of agonising secrecy, she has unburdened herself. "The truth is hard enough to live with but deceit is even harder. Once you've lied about your achievements, you've created a burden for yourself which you can never, never put down," she said yesterday.

Few people have not experienced that binding relief at having confessed – whether it be the errant husband or the exam cheat.

Some, however, cannot bear the public disgrace and suffer unimaginably. Earlier this year the US Navy's top admiral, Mike Boorda, killed

himself after questions were raised about medals he may not have earned. For him, his massive achievements, so much more important than the relatively trivial nature of his deception, had become irrelevant. And so it is with Ffyona. Those 1,000 miles were just a small proportion of her astonishing feat – she even went back and walked them recently alone and in secret. Yet even that act of contrition was not enough. Her deception had sullied everything else to the point where it nearly destroyed her. She had to come clean about what she had done. Who says our society has lost its sense of morality?

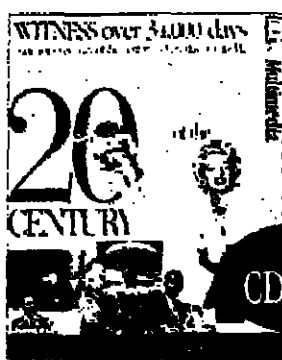
Jojo Moyes

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US giant will fight £13bn BT takeover

AT&T could spoil the party with protest on access

Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent

BT's planned takeover of MCI ran into heavyweight opposition yesterday as AT&T, the largest telecommunications company in the US, made clear that it will fight tooth and nail to block the £13bn (£13bn) merger.

As Sir Peter Bonfield, BT's chief executive, and Gerald Taylor, his opposite number at MCI, celebrated their "strategic merger" with champagne yesterday, AT&T was already preparing its formal complaint to the US regulator, the Federal Communications Commission.

Robert Allen, AT&T's chairman, will claim the takeover should be prevented from going ahead on the grounds that other US operators still do not enjoy free access to British markets. He said: "New entrants and carriers who want to serve customers still face significant barriers. BT still controls more than 90 per cent of all local telephone connections."

AT&T launched a service to UK business customers in January and to households in June, but BT's control of the local loop means residential customers can only access its long-distance network indirectly through dialling a special code.

It emerged that AT&T has already briefed FCC officials on the problem during a recent visit to the UK, which also included a meeting with Don Cruickshank, the head of the watchdog Ofcom.

Under US law BT must get the FCC's agreement to increase its stake in MCI above 25 per cent. The British group bought its 20 per cent shareholding in MCI three years ago for \$4.3bn. The FCC will examine whether the UK is as open to competition as the US, which is in the process of freeing up the \$100bn local telephone market.

In a fanfare of publicity BT yesterday confirmed its agreement to buy the remaining 80 per cent of MCI it does not already own, creating the world's fourth-largest telephone group with combined sales of \$42bn.

The new group will be called Concert, after the two companies' joint venture in business communications, with headquarters in London and Wash-

ington. BT and MCI will become subsidiaries of the new holding company and will continue to use their brands for existing services in local markets.

BT claimed the increased size of the group would enable it to accelerate the pace of growth already achieved in the US long-distance market by MCI.

"This merger is all about greater growth. We quicken the pace of the race we began with the joint venture," Mr Taylor argued.

The first step would be for MCI to expand into the US local phone network, first to business customers and later to households. Mr Taylor agreed that one of BT's main contributions to this would be its massive capital strength.

Merging operations should also bring cost savings of £1.5bn over the next five years, and some £500m annually after that. The reductions would come through merging BT and MCI's global marketing divisions, the pooling of some administrative functions, greater muscle when negotiating supply deals and £160m a year lower investment spending.

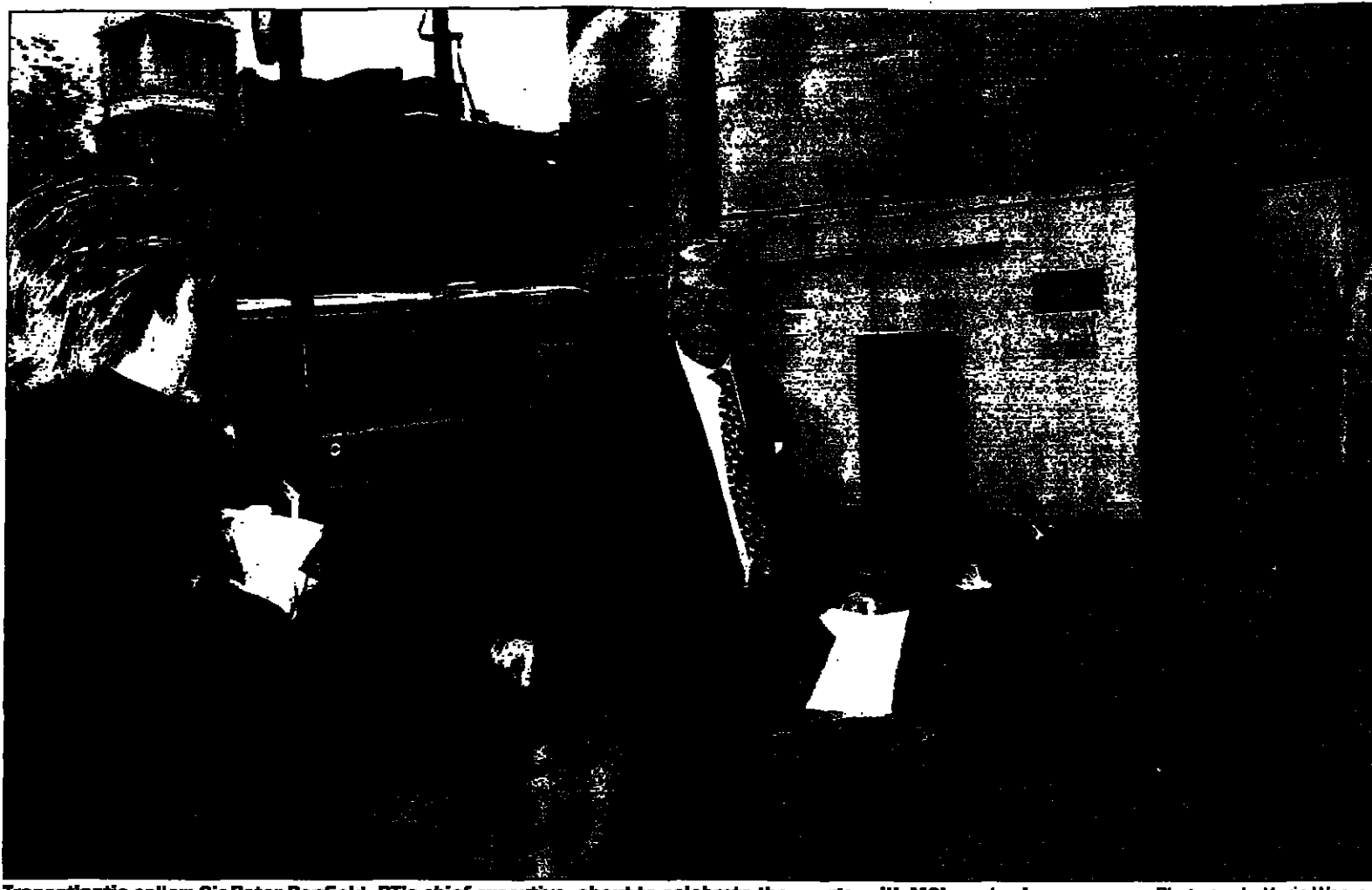
Sir Peter said there would be some job cuts in the 180,000 world-wide workforce, though these would be at least matched by new jobs created.

The task of integrating the organisations will fall to Bert Roberts, MCI's chairman. When the takeover is completed next autumn, regulatory hurdles permitting, it will have two co-chairmen, Sir Iain Valentine from BT and Mr Roberts.

Sir Peter will become chief executive of Concert with Mr Taylor below him as the president and chief operating officer. A significant individual beneficiary is Sir Colin Marshall, the chairman of British Airways, who becomes Concert's non-executive chairman. He joined BT's board in 1995.

The deal could also herald a pay bonanza for top executives in both firms. A special pay committee will examine salaries in the new concern.

BT denied any plans to sell the stake which Concert will hold in Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, through the 13.5 per cent stake currently owned by MCI.



Transatlantic caller: Sir Peter Bonfield, BT's chief executive, about to celebrate the merger with MCI yesterday

Photograph: Kevin Weaver

Small investors should see some gains

Nigel Cope

BT's mega-merger with MCI should be good news for the company's army of small investors, analysts said yesterday. "Private investors who still hold the shares have been through a lot of pain. Let's hope they are about to see some gain," said one telecoms analyst.

BT still has 2.3 million private shareholders who own 23 per cent of the company. More than a million of them own less than 400 shares, worth £1,400.

James Ross at Hoare Govett said BT's underlying earnings growth should increase from 5 per cent to around 11 per cent as a result of the deal, despite initial dilution of between 2 and 3 per cent in the first year. He said investors should also benefit from higher dividends, while the special dividend payout was an added bonus. "I think this is good news for the small investor," he said.

Mr Ross said the benefits of the merger included greater access to the US market. However, he conceded that this brought with it greater risks. "It is certainly a riskier investment but the potential rewards are greater too." He added that BT still had a stable core business with domestic and business customers paying their bills regularly once a quarter.

Mr Ross also said the deal had to rest criticisms that BT was "just an overblown national telecoms company." After this it will have a big business in the US and a large number of US shareholders.

Other analysts said the move into the US market was a diversification which should be viewed positively. A combination of regulatory uncertainties and increased competition from the cable companies and others in newly liberalised markets has put the shares under pressure in recent years.

BT was one of Britain's most popular privatisations when the first tranche of shares was sold in 1984. The price then was 130p. The second share sale was in 1991 at 335p. The third was in July 1993 at 410p.

Shareholders to receive £2.2bn windfall

BT's 2.3 million shareholders are to receive a substantial windfall in the shape of a 35p-a-share special dividend, worth a total of £2.2bn, regardless of whether the takeover of MCI goes ahead, writes Chris Godsmark.

The dividend, worth 10 per cent of the value of BT shares at their closing price of 351p last Friday, accounts for just under half the cash which the company will offer to secure the deal and will be paid in September 1997.

To further soften the blow, BT said its final dividend for the year to the end of next March would be 19.85p, an increase of 6.1 per cent on the same period in 1996.

The interim dividend for the six months to 30 September will be 7.9p – 6 per cent up on the previous year.

Explaining the financial implications of the takeover, Robert Brace, BT's finance director, said: "MCI shareholders get some cash and the BT shareholders get some cash."

We think they'll like it and that's why we've done it." In a complex arrangement a further £2.3bn (\$3.7bn) in cash will be paid to MCI investors in the form of \$6 for each share they hold.

The rest of the estimated \$21bn which BT is paying for the 80 per cent of MCI which it does not already own will be in the form of BT shares, which will be renamed Concert shares. Existing MCI shareholders will get 0.54 Concert shares for

each MCI share they own. BT shares trade in the US in the form of American Depositary Shares, which are equivalent to 10 ordinary shares in the company in the UK.

Valuing the deal depends on the performance of BT shares. Using Friday's closing price and then subtracting the final and special dividends, which are together worth \$4.85p, it suggests MCI shares are worth \$32.22.

This compares with a price of \$30.25 when MCI shares were suspended in New York on Friday and is somewhat lower than the \$35-\$37 a share BT sources had privately said was the likely range the company would have to pay.

The deal will transform BT's balance sheet, raising the company's debt by about \$4.5bn and increasing its gearing from around 8 per cent to some 65 per cent, which Mr Brace argued was a more efficient level.

Key facts of the merger

- One MCI share = 10 BT shares
- Concert = 50% MCI, 50% BT
- Special dividend = 35p per share = £2.2bn
- Advance corporation tax credit available
- 10% share buyback proposed
- £500m a year savings in five years

How Concert shapes up

Sales per annum	\$42bn
Number of Employees	180,000
Number of Countries	72
Number of customers	43 million
Market value	£33bn
Industry rank	4th

BT SPENDING ITS WAY OUT OF THE DOLDRUMS



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Open skies battle to be renewed

Michael Harrison

British and US negotiators will begin a fresh round of talks in Washington on Wednesday in a bid to break the deadlock over an open skies agreement across the Atlantic.

A breakthrough in the long-running talks would open up Heathrow to all US carriers and is vital if British Airways and American Airlines are to get the go-ahead for their transatlantic alliance.

However, industry observers believe it may be difficult for the two sets of negotiators to make headway over the issues that separate them.

The US is demanding fifth freedom rights for its carriers – the right to land at a UK airport, pick up passengers and fly on to a third country. In return, the UK wants cabotage rights in the US which would enable UK carriers to operate domestic services within North America.

So far Britain has vigorously

resisted the US demands even though fifth freedom rights have been a feature of every other open skies deal it has so far concluded with other European countries such as Germany and the Netherlands.

An industry observer said yesterday: "I cannot see the US negotiators budging from their insistence on fifth freedom rights. This has formed part of the template for every open skies deal they have done so far and I can't see them changing

things this time. If there is no open skies deal then there is no BA-American alliance."

BA opposes the idea of US carriers being allowed to fly to third countries from Heathrow because it would enable them to start competing not just on European routes but on services to long-distance destinations.

Virgin Atlantic, meanwhile, is pressing for cabotage rights insisting it could launch low-cost services within months if given the opportunity.

IN BRIEF

• **Gehe of Germany** is this week expected to re-enter the bid battle for Lloyds Chemists with an offer of over £550m. The group has until Friday to respond to last month's renewed £644m bid for Lloyds launched by rival UniChem and the indications are that it is gearing up to mount a new offer later this week. Gehe, which owns the Hilti pharmacy chain, has been playing a waiting game since both it and UniChem were cleared by the Department of Trade and Industry to renew the battle after the referral of both their previous offers to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

• **Employment in Britain's** small and medium-sized businesses rose significantly over the past four months, the first time the figure has risen in a year, according to a survey published today by the CBI and accountants Pannell Kerr Forster.

• **Joining European monetary union** on 1 January 1999 would trigger a "boom-bust" cycle in the UK economy, according to analysis by Oxford Economic Forecasting. Its model of the world economy shows that GDP growth would be boosted by 1 per cent in 1999 and 2000 by EMU entry as UK interest rates drop to continental levels. As a result, UK inflation in the early part of the next century would be nearly 1.5 per cent higher than if the UK remained outside EMU.

• **Significant tax cuts** in the Budget later this month would be inappropriate, according to economists at Coopers & Lybrand, as they would increase the risk of further interest rate rises later on. The conclusions are based on research which shows Coopers & Lybrand's feedforward factor index set to return to a positive level in 1997 for the first time in eight years.

• **Granada and Burger King**, the hamburger chain owned by Grand Metropolitan, is to open up to 75 co-branded Burger King/Little Chef restaurants over the next two years. Most of the restaurants will become fully operational in 1997.

Unions start campaign for recognition

Barrie Clement
Labour Editor

Employees' leaders are targeting companies to persuade them to recognise unions in anticipation of laws planned by the Labour Party.

The main steel union ISTC, in partnership with other TUC affiliates, will begin the campaign today when Johnson Matthey of north London and

Canadian company Co-Steel which has a plant at Sheerness in Kent.

Both companies have withdrawn recognition from unions – the only organisations in the steel and metals sector to do so – but both may have to reverse the decision should Labour be elected. Unions in other parts of industry are expected to adopt a similar strategy.

Tony Blair has pledged that

businesses will be legally obliged to deal with unions where a majority of employees in a workplace vote for it. The ISTC claims majority membership at both plants. Albion Pressed Metals, part of the German Thyssen group, which has never recognised unions, will be next on the hit list.

Union officials at ISTC argue that the election of a Labour government in the spring is in-

evitable and that it makes sense for companies to deal with unions voluntarily rather than be forced to do so after potentially acrimonious litigation. Union leaders argue that a similar approach was successfully adopted over European Works Councils where scores of companies established consultative procedures before a European directive was introduced on 22 September.

STOCK MARKETS									
FTSE 100									
Index	Close	Week's chg	Change (%)	1996 High	1996 Low	Yield (%)	1997 High	1997 Low	Yield (%)
FTSE 100	3948.50	-73.9	-1.8	4073.10	3832.30	3.97			
FTSE 250	4429.20	-2.3	-0.1	4568.60	4015.30	3.52			
FTSE 350	1971.40	-29.2	-1.5	2022.10	1816.60	3.87			
FTSE SmallCap	2167.41	-11.5	-0.5	2244.36	1954.06	3.14			
FTSE All-Share	1946.55	-27.3	-1.4	1994.54	1791.95	3.82			
New York	6021.93	+14.9	+0.2	6094.23	5082.94	2.15			
Tokyo	20633.05	-106.9	-0.5	22666.80	19734.70	0.781			
Hong Kong	12529.27	+149.1	+1.2	12629.27	10204.87	3.311			
Frankfurt	2663.25	+9.0	+0.3	2734.82	2283.36	1.751			

Source: FT Information

INTEREST RATES									
UK interest rates					US interest rates				
Instrument	1 Month	3 Months	6 Months	1 Year	Instrument	1 Month	3 Months	6 Months	1 Year
Bank of England base rate	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	Federal Reserve discount rate	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.25
3 Month bill	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	3 Month bill	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.25
6 Month bill	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	6 Month bill	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.25
1 Year bill	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	1 Year bill	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.25

CURRENCIES									
£/\$					£/DM				
Instrument	1 Month	3 Months	6 Months	1 Year	Instrument	1 Month	3 Months	6 Months	1 Year
£/\$	1.6376	1.6376	1.6376	1.6376	£/DM	0.6106	0.6106	0.6106	0.6106
\$/£	0.6106	0.6106	0.6106	0.6106	\$/DM	1.6376	1.6376	1.6376	1.6376

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صباح الخير

Governor leads Chancellor by two goals to one

GAVYN DAVIES

'Nobody pointed out last week that Mr Clarke's decision involved a tacit admission that his previous key judgement - to reduce base rates in June - was a mistake'

The Chancellor received a generally favourable press for raising base rates last week, and his decision certainly represents a feather in the cap for the new monetary mechanism in Britain. Were it not for the fact that the Governor of the Bank of England was threatening to become ever more awkward in the run-up to the election, it would have been all too easy for Kenneth Clarke to have done nothing before polling day, probably using the excuse of a rising pound to leave base rates unchanged.

Instead, he no doubt reckoned that a small move now was not only justified economically, but would also keep the Governor off his back as polling day approached. Admittedly, there would still have been a large element of political calculation in the move, but it was a calculation that had to be made within completely different confines from those faced by previous Chancellors. For that, we should be grateful.

It is interesting that nobody pointed out last week that Mr Clarke's decision involved a tacit admission that his previous key judgement - to reduce base rates in June - was a mistake. For some reason, the overall public perception is clearly that the Chancellor has generally proved right in his disputes with the Governor, and certainly the Governor appears to attract more flak from the press when he is deemed to be wrong. But I would argue that the Bank of England has nothing to be ashamed about so far in its track record under the new mechanism.

There have been three significant differences of view since the present monetary framework was launched. In February 1994,

with the economy about to embark on a period of rapid GDP growth and rising inflation pressure, the Chancellor announced a cut in base rates from 5.5 to 5.25 per cent, saying that he was concerned that his advisers were too often "erring on the side of caution". The Governor on the other hand said that he thought the existing setting of policy was already easy enough to ensure that GDP growth would soon exceed 3 per cent, and he opposed the cut in base rates.

The Governor was clearly right on this occasion. Growth in real GDP soon surged above 4 per cent, and by September the Chancellor was forced to change tack with a 0.5 per cent increase in the base rate. One-nil to the Bank.

The second important episode was the high-profile difference from May to September 1995. At that time, the Bank recommended an increase in base rates from 6.75 to 7.25 per cent, and this was rejected by the Chancellor on the grounds that it would "result in a tighter policy stance than was necessary to meet the inflation objective, and depress activity further when it was already slowing". Mr Clarke was certainly right in the second part of this assessment, and the emergence of weaker economic activity last summer forced the Governor to shelve his request for higher rates by the end of July.

Without exception, economic commentators have scored this as a goal for Mr Clarke, but there is room for doubt. Mr George's recom-

mendation to raise base rates rested on a bet that the odds of hitting the Government's 2.5 per cent inflation target over the next 18-24 months were less than 50 per cent. This, after all, is what the Chancellor asked the Bank to do when he established the new monetary mechanism. And, so far, the Bank's forecasts have not been far wrong.

Eleven months after the dispute of May 1995, inflation remains well above the official target, though this has happened in the context of generally lower interest rates than the Bank anticipated when its advice was given. If base rates had been held at the original level of 6.75 per cent indefinitely, the inflation target may well have been hit. On reflection, it would be churlish to deny this was an equaliser for Mr Clarke.

The third dispute came in June 1996, when

the Chancellor cut base rates from 6 to 5.75 per cent, citing a lack of inflationary pressure, and worries about the sustainability of the recovery for his decision. Mr George, meanwhile, opposed the cut, arguing that consumer demand remained strong, and any further slowdown in growth would prove temporary. As noted above, there is little doubt that this was another goal for the Governor.

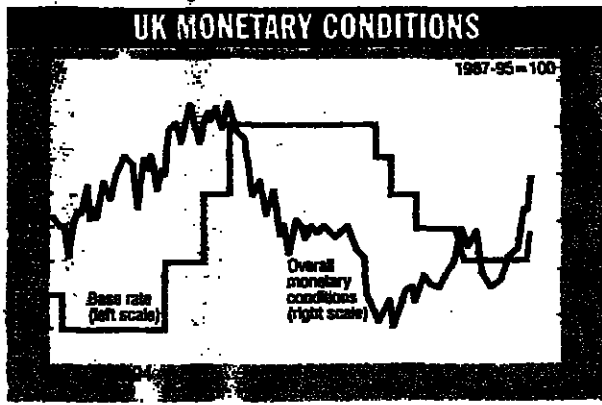
On my subjective scoring system, the Governor therefore leads the Chancellor by two goals to one, with the game deep into the second half. So why does the vast bulk of the body politic seem to believe the advantage lies the other way around? I suspect it is for the depressing reason that so few genuinely share the objective of keeping inflation below 2.5 per cent, or at least they are unwilling to make any output sacrifice to achieve it.

Accordingly, when the Bank recommends policy changes necessary to hit the inflation target, it attracts much criticism from those who do not share the objective in the first place. And whenever Mr Clarke leans in the direction of taking risks with the inflation target, he seems to be loudly applauded, especially if house prices rise at the same time. Those who are charged with policing the inflation target are never likely to win much gratitude, even if they are proved absolutely right in retrospect - but then unpopularity is generally the fate of a good central banker.

Having got that off my chest, let us turn briefly to the state of macro-economic policy. The graph shows the recent changes in base rates, along with an index of overall monetary conditions, calculated by Goldman Sachs. The latter index includes long-term interest rates and the sterling exchange rate along with base rates in a composite measure of the stance of monetary policy. It is obvious from the graph that changes in base rates are far from the only determinant of the overall monetary stance, and in fact there are clearly occasions when monetary conditions tighten even though base rates are falling.

One such occasion was the first half of this year, when the decline in base rates was not sufficient to offset the strong rise in sterling, so overall monetary conditions tightened, even though the Chancellor was trying to achieve the exact opposite. In this regard, developments in 1996 have been the precise mirror image of those in 1995, when a decline in sterling meant that monetary conditions eased, though base rates remained largely unchanged.

Base rates are still 0.75 per cent below the levels that were reached late last year, but overall monetary conditions have nevertheless tightened almost as much as they did in the last phase of stringency in 1994. Of course, it is never entirely safe to rely on the foreign exchange markets to tighten policy on behalf of the Chancellor - and it is certainly not optimal to do so for very long - but the strength of the pound means that monetary conditions are tighter than they look. If this persists, Mr Clarke may not need to raise base rates again before the election.



Hinchliffe receives winding-up ultimatum over Facia

Paul Farrelly

Receivers to Facia, the collapsed Sock Shop-to-Saxone shoes group, have given controversial founder Stephen Hinchliffe and his fellow directors two weeks to start a voluntary liquidation or else face compulsory winding-up. The ultimatum follows hard

on the heels of a law suit by Facia's main backer, Israel's United Mizrahi Bank, against former staff over alleged backhanders received for arranging loans of over £20m to the retailer. "We have written to the directors and their solicitors. We think now is the time to get on with this," KPMG partner Tony Thompson said at the weekend.

"We will give them more time. If nothing happens, say within 10 days we will have to consider a compulsory petition for winding-up." UMB's move, revealed yesterday by the *Independent* on Sunday, is the latest in a raft of legal action surrounding Mr Hinchliffe and Facia's collapse with £70m of debts in June.

Sources say he will also shortly be interviewed by the Serious Fraud Office, which raided his Sheffield home in August. In writs issued last week, the Bank is seeking damages and the return of alleged illicit payments via Malibu Management Corporation, a British Virgin Islands company, to three ex-employees at its London branch.

UMB, represented by City lawyers Nabarro Nathanson and barristers David Richards QC and Matthew Collins, is expected to return to the High Court today to extend injunctions granted last week. The money is alleged to have been paid by South London property trader Robert Leckie, who is understood to have introduced Mr Hinchliffe to UMB and received at least £1.3m of commissions on loans advanced.

At the weekend, Mr Leckie's solicitor insisted the introductory fees were legitimate and refuted the allegations that backhanders were subsequently paid via a Malibu account at Credit Suisse in Switzerland between October 1995 and January this year. But he admitted Mr Leckie had had financial dealings with the employees, who include Rafael Kellner, the former head of UMB's London branch. Mr Hinchliffe declined to return calls to discuss his relationship with Mr Leckie and UMB.



Hinchliffe: Given two weeks

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science



Batten down the hatches: last week's storms may be due to a 'flip' in the North Atlantic Oscillation - presaging a harsh winter

Richard Austin

Get ready for the big chill

The weather system controlling Europe's winters has changed. Bill Burroughs explains

Have you noticed the weather lately? Autumn arrived with a vengeance last week, with storms lashing much of the UK almost as soon as the clocks were turned back. But it's not just seasonal.

There has been a flip in the weather patterns over the North Atlantic which has a number of interesting climatic consequences. Not only does it mean a significant interruption in the upward trend in global warming, but also it has more immediate implications for winter weather in Europe.

The change, which occurred about a year ago, is part of a phenomenon known as the North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO). It shows up most strongly during the winter.

Before last winter, the previous eight years featured predominantly strong westerly circulation that brought almost unbroken mild weather to northern Europe, but extremely severe seasons to Greenland. Last winter, for the first time since the mid-Eighties, the hemispheric patterns became stuck in a form that brings much colder conditions here.

The nature of this switch was first recognised by a Danish missionary, Hans Egede Saabye, in the late 18th century. He noted that in Greenland, although all winters are severe, they are not alike. The Danes noted that when the winter in Denmark was severe, the winter in Greenland was (by its standards) mild, and vice-versa. This see-saw behaviour was quantified by Sir Gilbert Walker in the

1920s in terms of pressure differences between Iceland and southern Europe. He named it the North Atlantic Oscillation.

The NAO shifts between a deep depression near Iceland coupled with high pressure around the Azores - which produces strong westerly winds - and the reverse pattern with much weaker circulation. The first, the strong westerly pattern, pushes mild air across Europe and into Russia, while pulling cold air southwards over western Greenland. It also tends to bring mild winters to much of North America. One significant climatic effect is the reduction of snow cover, not only during the winter, but well into the spring.

The reverse, meandering pattern often features high pressure over Iceland or Scandinavia, which pulls cold Arctic air down into Europe, and funnels mild air up towards Greenland. This produces much more extensive continental snow cover, reinforcing the cold weather in Scandinavia and eastern Europe. That is what happened last winter and spring.

Since 1870, the NAO has fluctuated appreciably on timescales from several years to a few decades. It took the strong westerly form between 1900 and 1915, in the Twenties and, most notably, from 1988 to 1995. But it flipped to the sluggish meandering form in the 1940s and Sixties, bringing frequent severe winters to Europe but exceptionally mild weather in Greenland.

These fluctuations are now seen as a major factor in understanding climatic change. They

have had a quasi-periodic flavour, in that they have often stuck in one phase for a number of years before switching to opposite form. But they do not show regular cycles, which would provide a clue as to what is driving this oscillation.

The importance of the NAO for understanding climatic change is the effect it exerts on average temperatures in the northern hemisphere. Because winters show the greatest variance of all the seasons, annual temperatures tend to be heavily influenced by whether the winter was very mild or very cold. When the NAO is in its strong westerly phase, its benign impact over much of northern Eurasia and North America outweighs the cooling around Greenland, and this shows up in the annual figures. So, a significant part of the global warming in the past 10 years has been associated with the very mild winters in the northern hemisphere.

One of the challenges for scientists in predicting future climatic change is anticipating the behaviour of the NAO. So far the computer models of the global climate cannot yet handle switches in weather regimes of the type experienced by the NAO last winter. The latest models, such as the one developed at the Hadley Centre at Bracknell, while doing an increasingly good job on the broad features of global warming - including predicting an initial cooling in the vicinity of Greenland - have underestimated the rapid warming over land in the northern hemisphere in the Eighties. This may

be due in part to difficulties in handling the NAO.

The solution probably lies in better models of how the atmosphere interacts with the oceans. Because the NAO in its westerly phase produces very cold conditions in the North Atlantic around Greenland, this may, over a number of years, sustain sufficient changes to alter ocean circulation patterns. These, in turn, could create circumstances that trigger a switch to the sluggish phase of the NAO. This process could flip-flop back and forth in an irregular manner, depending on how it was influenced by the behaviour of the rest of the global climate system.

Even more speculative is the possibility that ocean-atmosphere interactions, such as the NAO, are part of much more dramatic changes that occurred at the end of the last Ice Age and at earlier times in the Earth's climatic history. Some global climate models do suggest that it may be possible for changes in atmospheric circulation to produce long-lasting shifts in ocean currents. One such change could effectively divert the Gulf Stream on to a more southerly course, bringing much colder winters to northern Europe. Computer predictions of global warming do hint at regions of both warming and cooling in different parts of the North Atlantic - suggesting that human activities are capable of producing erratic climatic reactions to small perturbations.

It may be some time before we have models that tell us what controls the NAO and to what

extent human activities could lead to one or other phase becoming more prevalent, and so to more dramatic changes in the climate. In the meantime, the evidence of the past natural behaviour of the oscillation is that once it switches it is likely to remain in the new phase for several years. Last winter's cold weather may be a harbinger of things to come, despite the global warming of the past two decades. Perhaps it's time to start hunting out those warm clothes again.

Bill Burroughs is the author of *Weather Cycles: Real or Imaginary?*, £14.99, Cambridge University Press.

If it ain't broke, sell it

What do you get for producing great results in a government-funded research institute? Privatised, says Charles Arthur

It might sound like good news that a British institution 50 per cent funded by the Government has just been declared to be doing some of the best research in biological sciences in the country - better than any university, by the yardstick used.

Yet to some at the Babraham Institute, in Cambridge, the result announced last week was not unalloyed good news. In their battle against further cuts in their government funding, they fear that this news could be just what those pushing for privatisation want.

The findings came in the latest data from the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI), an independent Philadelphia-based organisation which does one core activity: it looks at all the scientific papers published all over the world, and notes which papers they cite, and in turn which future papers cite the original.

This so-called "citation index" has rapidly become the ruler against which any paper is measured, the quickest way to find out which areas of research are buzzing, and which authors and papers within those fields are hottest. Any scientist with even a hint of vanity follows their paper's position in the ISI Index with the breathless enthusiasm of a would-be pop star scanning the charts for signs of their latest single.

Thus Richard Dyer, head of the Babraham Institute, could be forgiven for feeling a warm glow of satisfaction when the latest ISI Index showed that papers in the field of biological sciences published by scientists at the Babraham were more frequently cited than any British university's. In fact, the institute came second only to the well-known Molecular Biology Laboratory, also in Cambridge, which is funded by the Medical Research Council.

The Babraham is slightly different. It specialises in the life sciences, and particularly in the fields of "cell signalling" - the process by which cells communicate chemically - and animal development and the recognition mechanisms at cellular level that are essential for life.

This is done by looking at the "pathways" between cells - usually in pigs and mice. When signalling goes wrong, the effects can be cancerous, so there are

implications for human disease and their control. The work ultimately has applications in biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, and biomedicine. But the Institute's work is more in the nature of basic research. The most cited Babraham paper, from Nature in 1984, discussed a cell signal messenger called inositol triphosphate. Against the "expected" 517 citations, it received 5,028. A 1993 Babraham paper on a similar topic received 1,364 citations, rather than the expected 160.

Officially, the 450-strong institute is a registered charity, but it receives underpinning support from the Government via the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BSRC), which provides 56 per cent of its £15m funding. Other funding comes from private-sector work.

But under the Government's "Prior Options" scheme, any public-sector research establishment is under increasing scrutiny to see whether its work is needed. If it is, the next question is whether the public sector needs to fund that work - that is, should the establishment be privatised. Other options are merger with another organisation or a different mode of management.

The Prior Options system has a Thatcherite ring to it - the option of leaving well alone doesn't seem to be on the list. But that is exactly what Dr Dyer thinks should be done. "We are achieving strong success with our research, we have ambitious plans for the future, and any unnecessary upheaval will be a distraction with the potential

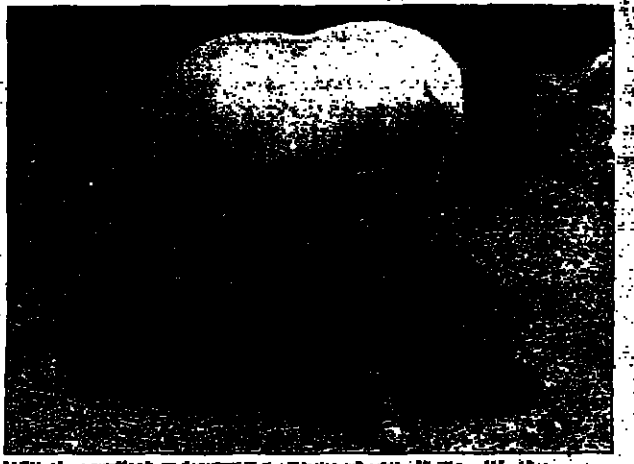
to cause much damage to our performance."

The ISI's independent assessment might also seem to imply that the Babraham is doing fine with the system as it is. "We are pleased with the ISI results, but not complacent," says Dr Dyer. There is much more the institute can do, he says - but only if the Government continues its underpinning support.

The trouble is, according to one source at the institute, that the ISI result can be seen as fuel by either side - both Dr Dyer's, and the would-be privatisers. Doing well according to ISI's measurement could be taken to mean that the institute has the ideal platform to be launched entirely into the commercial world: by pointing to its past successes, and especially its ISI position, the management could get industrial backing to fund their work.

But what if the ISI citation meter had shown that the institute was far down the ratings? "They would then say we ought to be privatised because we're not providing value for money," says the source. Dr Dyer comments, "The ISI results show the current arrangements for the institute are a highly effective way to derive excellent value for public money spent on science."

But with Prior Options around, nothing is safe. It may be that the approaching election will simplify matters. The Labour Party, at least, has pledged to stop any privatisation of public research laboratories. Perhaps then the Babraham's staff will be able to breathe a little easier - and get on with their world-beating work.

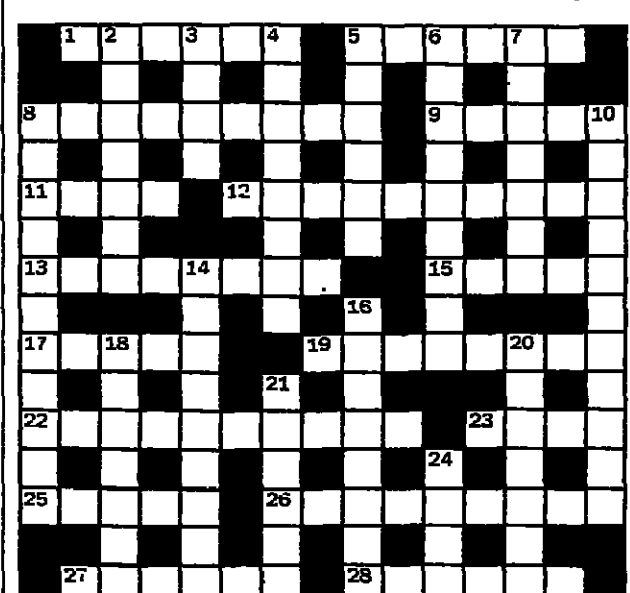


Will these little piggy banks go to market, along with the Babraham Institute? Keith Dobney

THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

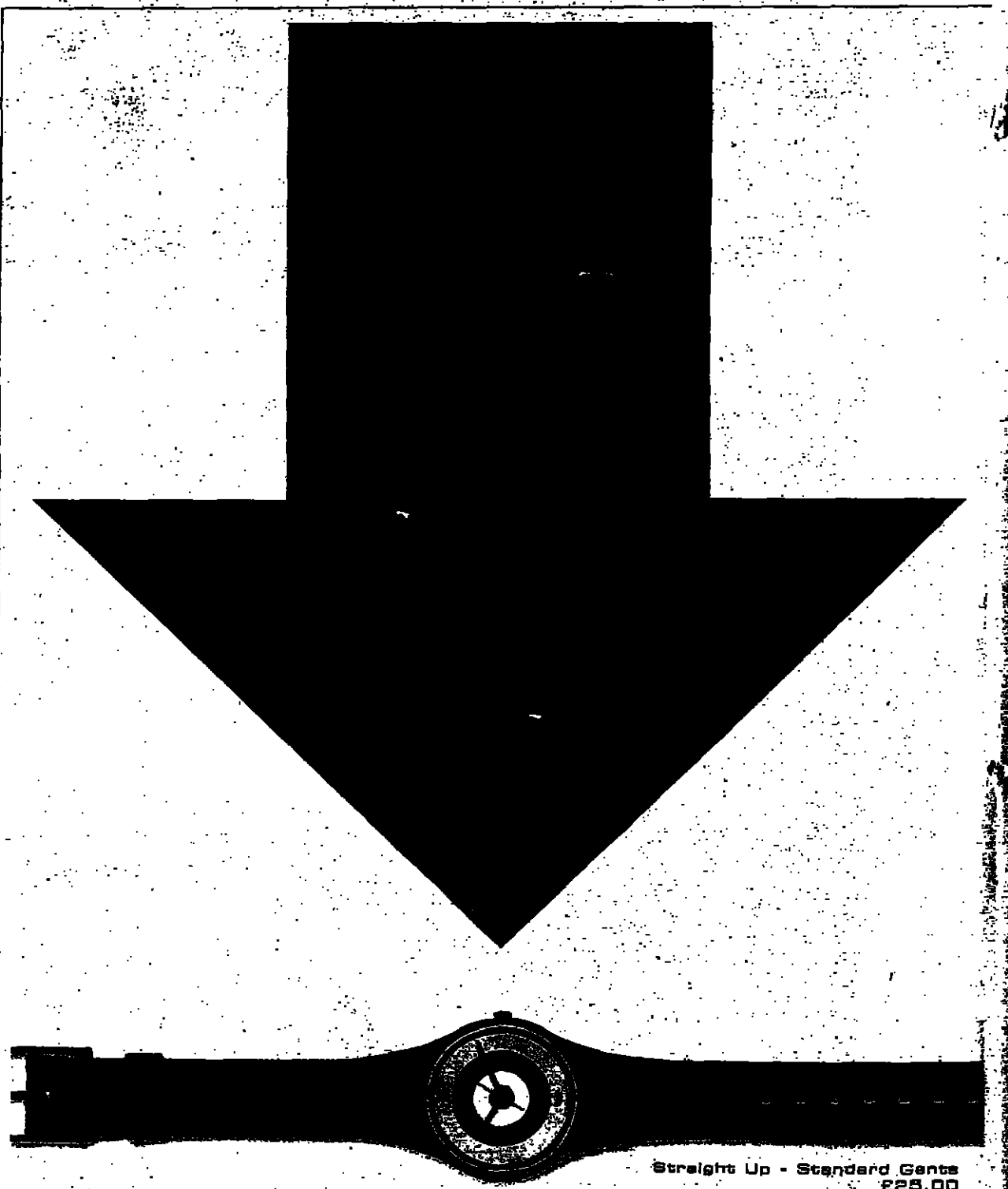
No. 3135, Monday 4 November

By Mass



- ACROSS**
- Polish language is spoken ... (6)
 - ... I found among shy types in States? (6)
 - Shoot magazine in contest (4,5)
 - Man provides state with a service (5)
 - Roll eye reflectively (4)
 - One among constituents advanced an argument (10)
 - III? (8)
 - No time for the weed in the corner (5)
 - Commission from rank (5)
 - Rather dear pet - she is playful (9)
 - Dire changes harboured by elected man for constituent (10)
 - Incumbent's making less than ... (2,2)
 - ... a climber? Must be a fix on reflection (5)
 - Not the best attributes for rifles! (5,4)

- DOWN**
- Hag's grin enthralling lord (6)
 - Dark suit almost signifies depression (6)
 - Winkle out learner's writing accessory (7)
 - A place for a pupil (4)
 - Great man's high point, I see (8)
 - Cartoonist initially animates rooks (6)
 - Pull commercial vehicle? You'll need time, a long time (9)
 - Pacific's endless fish, swarming (7)
 - Provincial reserve? (11)
 - They'll stretch material on which suspense is built up (11)
 - What might supply us with a minder? (9)
 - Jack has run on first-class road (8)
 - I must turn up in time for civic office (7)
 - Put at risk, I'm left without spirit (7)
 - Graceful greenery the Italian raised (6)
 - Best? Exactly - not second-class (4)



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